

Literature and Psychology

The News Letter of the Conference on Literature and Psychology of the Modern Language Association

Issued quarterly during the months of February, May, August, and November

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Vol. VI

November, 1956

NO. 4

**Sigmund
Freud**

1856-1939



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FREUD CENTENARY ISSUE

Wenn ich nicht überzeugt wäre, dass die Kindheit schon ein Vorspiel des ganzen Leben ist und bis zu ihrem Abschlusse schon die Hauptzüge den menschlichen Zerwürfnisse im Kleinen abspiegele, so dass später mir weniger Erlebnissen vorkommen mögen, deren Umriss nicht wie ein Traum schon im unserm Wissen vorhanden, wie ein Schema, welches, wenn es Gutes bedeutet, froh zu erfüllen ist, wenn aber Übles, als frühe Warnung gelten kann, so würde ich mich nicht so weitläufig mit den kleinen Dingen jener Zeit beschäftigen.

--- Gottfried Keller (c. 1850) /1

Art brings about a reconciliation of the pleasure-principle and the reality-principle in a peculiar way. The artist is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from his world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts he moulds his phantasy into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be, without pursuing the circuitous path of creating real alterations in the outer world. But this he can only attain because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because this dissatisfaction, resulting from the displacement of the pleasure-principle by the reality-principle, is itself a part of reality.

--- Sigmund Freud (1911) /2

The unanswered question as to the origin of the creative imagination naturally is of utmost importance to the psychoanalytic biographer. . . . Creation tends to be experienced in two phases. In the first, the creator is driven; he is in an exceptional state. This is what we call the moment of inspiration. The ecstasy of the creative state has been variously described as divine, pathological, superhuman. Actually, nothing comes suddenly into existence in the mind. Everything is slowly developed, in a particular, individualistic way. That moment of inspiration is most probably the moment of narcissistic acknowledgment of something which has been unconsciously prepared for a long time. The second phase is no longer exceptional, it is elaboration.

--- Edward Hitschmann (1956) /3

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- 1/ Epigraph to Edward Hitschmann, Gottfried Keller: Psychoanalyse des Dichters, seinen Gestalten und Motive (Wien: Internationaler Psychoanalytischen Verlag, 1919).
 - 2/ "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning," in Collected Papers, Vol. IV, p. 19 (tr. by M. N. Searl from Jahrbuch, Bd. III). (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953.)
 - 3/ From the Introduction to Great Men, pp. 18-19 (New York: International Universities Press, 1956.)

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

* * The Tentative Agenda of the Seventh Annual (Freud Centenary) Conference, which will be held at 2:00 p. m. in the Pan American Room of the Hotel Statler, Washington, D. C., on Thursday, December 27, 1956, will not be included in this issue. It will be distributed in mimeographed form at the time of the meeting in Washington. Readers who cannot attend the meeting are urged to submit their brief comments on the Conference papers in writing to the Editor. These comments will be read or summarized during the discussion period at the Conference.

* * The Conference will be preceded by a Freud Centenary Luncheon, to be held at the Hotel Burlington, not far from the Statler, at 12:15 p. m. promptly. A reservation form for this luncheon is enclosed with this issue.

* * The Index to the Contents of Volume VI (1956) will be distributed with the first 1957 issue. It will follow the form and arrangement of the Five-Year Index (1951-55) which appeared in the summer of 1956. Corrigenda and addenda to that Five-Year Index should be sent to the Editor for inclusion with the current Index.

PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERATURE *

So many attempts have been made to discuss precisely the relationship of psychology with literature or to suggest the usefulness of psychology to criticism that one needs first of all to see if a new perspective isn't somehow available. I believe we know both the advantage and the limitations of the biographical study of writers; and no one can escape these days the dark presence of Jung's "primordial images." Perhaps we may find our best access to the problem by looking once again at a structure and terminology contributed at the beginning of the century and before by Sigmund Freud and elaborated upon by him in subsequent years.

I refer of course to Freud's definition, description and analysis of the psychic economy. These involve a series of metaphors, as bold a series as was ever advanced by a cautious scientist. Beginning only with the facts of the unconscious and the conscious mind, Freud saw first of all, or suspected, both the tension between the two and what he called the constancy, or balance, of energy that invariably characterized this tension. From these simple beginnings came the terminology with which we are all now familiar: the id, ego, super-ego; the unconscious, preconscious, conscious; the pleasure principle and the reality principle, and so on.

Described in Freud's own words (*The Ego and the Id*, London, Hogarth Press, 1927), "... the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world acting through the Perceptual-Conscious: in a sense it is an extension of the surface-differentiation. Moreover, the ego has the task of bringing the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality-principle for the pleasure-principle which reigns supreme in the id. In the ego perception plays the part which in the id devolves upon instinct. The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions." (29-30)

These terms were in the nature of accessory metaphors, introduced as the original insight into psychic tensions required elaboration and its subtleties needed definition. I am aware of the fact that these formulations stem from a desire to assert and affirm the existence of what underlay the conscious, external world, of what we know from having seen or sensed. It is also true that they are the product of a desire to pay a discreet tribute to the language of orthodox science. There is nothing at all unusual or surprising in Freud's characterization of these phenomena; nor was Freud the first to emphasize the need to examine an "unconscious" life or mind. It is perhaps in his admirable and patient consistency of attention that the merit of his system lies -- as well as in its availability to almost endless, fruitful elaboration.

Once we have established that the unconscious is a positive entity, a specific and viable aspect of the psyche, then we may proceed to describe it. We continue to do so, however, by the ingenious method of analyzing causally the aberrancies and obliquities of the conscious mind; and our major instrument in such analysis is language. We must assume a language norm, a norm of linguistic behavior, linked to a kind of systematic logical or rational form. If there are such norms -- if they may be maintained without one's retreating too far into abstractions -- then it is possible to examine variants, deviations, subterfuges, psychic "jamming," and to explain them as a part of the strategy of the id, as a verbal consequence of the tension resulting from the flow and counterflow of psychic energy.

Freud's own description of these processes is both precise and illuminating: "By virtue of its relation to the perceptual system, the ego/ arranges the processes of the mind in a temporal order and tests their correspondence with reality. By interposing the process of thinking it secures a postponement of motor discharges and controls the avenues to motility. . . . All the experiences of life that originate from without enrich the ego; the id, however, is another outer world to it, which it strives to bring into subjection to itself. It withdraws libido from the id and transforms the object-cathexes of the id into object-constructions. With the aid of the super-ego, though in a manner that is still obscure to us [1927], it draws upon the experiences of past ages stored in the id." (*The Ego and the Id*, 81-82)

This is what amounts to a psychological analysis of the basic constituents of a literature. In terms of it we may illuminate much of what we discuss in literary criticism as form, texture, metaphor, and symbol. I should like to suggest the following plan for a criticism based upon Freud's initial descriptions of the psychic order. Let us assume that our psychic life may be divided into primary and secondary processes; that these, since they are located differently and react to different kinds of exposure, are in conflict with each other, or more accurately that they cause conflict in the psyche; that basic energies (whether of wish or desire, as Freud maintained, or of some other incentive) are turned back upon themselves, or are permitted only partial expression, or express themselves fully only in extraordinary circumstances; that our understanding of these energies comes from the fact of their being thwarted, controlled, suspended in a state of partial expression; and that, ultimately, the ideal psychic state results from a balance of tensions and a conservation of psychic energy. A number of important opportunities for the description of our psychic lives occur to us. While the energies are not specifically one thing or another, they may be characterized with a quite satisfactory and useful precision. The push, drive, energy of the id are desire, wish, for pleasure, for specific gratifications; the agency for thwarting the desire is exposed to the reality itself, the external world which indicates

* Based upon a paper read at the Fifteenth Session of The English Institute, Columbia University, on September 6, 1956, in the series *Peripheries of Literature*. It will appear shortly in *The Kenyon Review*.

its prohibitions by inflicting pain or forcing retreat. An uninhibited drive toward satisfaction of unconscious wishes (or expenditure of libidinal energy) would lead to death. The wish needs instruction in the shock of reality; if the character of inhibition is moderate, the shock will lead to readjustment; if the reality is too suddenly and too brutally enforced, the effect will be a traumatic shock, leading to one of several forms of compulsive behavior. Freud assumes stability in the external world; Hemingway among others, did not find it so. But this shock is not limited either to the accidents of uninhibited desire or to the catastrophes of an uncontrolled reality. Repression is in itself a cause of pain; it may, in the interests of protecting the psyche and prolonging life, cause violent dislocations of the psychic system.

However inadequate this may be as a sketch of Freud's superbly exact descriptions, I introduce it here as a preliminary to examining its usefulness as a perspective upon literature. The two share in common what we may call a necessary language -- language as the instrument of description becomes in the course of my discussion language as a system of strategies. Language is necessary at first to label and define; next, to put phenomena in order; then to characterize the nature of incentives for labeling and ordering; finally, in the most remarkable of its ranges of use, to effect changes in meaning, to represent situations as more complex than they might be or are or ought to be. In the mind of a person endowed with every resource of language, the phenomena of psychic tension, conflict, drive, repression, are articulated and represented in a discourse at once psychologically just and remarkably subtle. I should like to suggest, therefore, that literature may be viewed and analyzed in terms of the verbal and metaphorical equivalents of the psyche and its behavior. Literature possesses a greater metaphoric freedom than psychology, or perhaps it has the license of its own audacity. But it is actively engaged in providing verbal and metaphoric equivalents of and elaborations upon the simply described behavior of the id, ego, and super-ego in their dynamic relationships. I can scarcely go on from here, to insist upon exact equivalents; it is perhaps as unwise to find iddities and egocentricities in literature as it is to accept literally biographical peculiarities as definitive explanations of achieved works of art. To locate an author's id, ego, super-ego, etc., in either characters or lines is to violate the subtlety of their necessary arrangements. My purpose is, instead, to explain the complexities of literary work as the results of symbolic actions which report and reflect on a high level of linguistic articulateness and subtlety the basic tensions, balances, imbalances, repressions, and compensations of psychic energies contained within a system such as Freud has described.

In any application of such a criticism, we can begin with fairly simple definitions. The creative process begins with a relaxation of ego control. There are other examples of such relaxation: drunkenness, forms of schizophrenia, dreams. But the work of the artist differs usually from these in that the regression is deliberate and controlled. The creative artist is aware of the regression; one may almost say he wills it (there have been cases of poets who have tried to force it by artificial means). The creative mind suspends its work between inspiration and control, or criticism. The artist is aware first of all that he is in a state of suspension; deliberately he has allowed the ego to give in to the flow of energy from the id. As Ernst Kris has put it (Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art, N. Y., Int. U. Press, 1952, pp. 253-54): (with Abraham Kaplan)

We may speak here of a shift in psychic level, consisting in the fluctuation of functional regression and control. When regression goes too far, the symbols become private, perhaps unintelligible even to the reflective self; when, at the other extreme, control is preponderant, the result is described as cold, mechanical, and uninspired.

As Freud has pointed out (in The Interpretation of Dreams and elsewhere), in the unconscious which has been affected by the ego's inhibitions reside the potential strategies for circumventing the ego. Such strategies as condensation, displacement, additive substitutes for negations or for the conditional mode are all a product of the id-ego tension. The verbalization of this tension is available in the preconscious. Of basic interest to literary criticism is the fact that impulse and inhibition are here in mixed, that multiple meanings and ambiguities are thus a result of the conflict between desire and inhibition. An ambiguity may be said to suggest in language the subtlety of an achieved balance. The complexity of the human state resides neither in the fully charged impact of desire upon the ego nor in the ego's use of societal prohibitions to stop the impact (each of these by itself is superficial) -- but, rather, in the product of the conflict. The ego provides the language of discourse in its relationship with the preconscious (which is largely charged with the oughtness and counter-energy of conscience); the id determines the strategies used to mitigate, violate, or circumvent. In a remarkable range of meanings and metaphor, literature records the infinite variety of these exchanges and conflicts.

There are two major considerations relevant to literary criticism: they are the multiplicity of meanings in literature and the element of form. Form is largely a product of the ego; social and moral forms are related to aesthetic forms; or, rather, aesthetic form is an extension of the logic of social and moral forms. That literary forms have great variety is no more remarkable a fact than that form persists through such variety. Experiment in literary form probably comes from a distrust of traditional form; the container no longer satisfactorily orders the thing contained. Thus an attempt to introduce a "qualitative" form, or to insist upon symbolic as distinguished from rational progression comes at least in part from a dissatisfaction with form as not allowing sufficient texture or as overly inhibiting the opportunity of texture. Texture is itself a variant of form: rhythm both encourages and controls freedom of meaning; a rhyme pattern both enhances the quality of word sounds and sets a limit to their frequency.

More specifically, forms are the special province of the ego; they are the means of inhibition, the ways of containing creative energy, of balancing its tensions and of securing a maximum of discernibility within the range of particulars. The only way of making oneself understood, in short, of communicating, is to contain the charge of psychic energy within a formal pattern that has initially and psychologically been introduced as a way of preventing an uninhibited charge of energy. This process may cost much. A slavish obedience to form for form's sake is of course debilitating and unrewarding. But the tension set up by form and texture leads to articulation and then to containment of the basic energy drives that have existed initially inarticulate and without form. Ernst Kris has given us a very interesting discussion of what he calls "stringencies," a term he uses to define external restraints put upon expression in art.

The level of stringency in works of art -- their degree of interpretability -- varies markedly from period to period. In some cases ambiguity is fully exploited, and correspondingly great demands are made on the audience; in other cases, there is no more ambiguity than is involved in the work's being aesthetic at all; the demands on the audience are minimal; the interpretations called for are rigidly limited. We may suggest that art is likely to be characterized by low stringency (i.e., high ambiguity and interpretability) where systems of conduct or ideals are in doubt or social values are in process of transition.

(Ibid., 262)

This is true especially when those aspects of form which define the thing contained while in the act of containing it no longer serve the ego adequately, whether because they have weakened through an excess of abstraction (the definitions no longer define), or because they have become too arbitrarily fixed (the definitions are too remote from the particulars they are supposed to contain). We may say that any form is the result of a series of accidents. As in any situation where balance serves to make energy intelligible, form in literature is the consequence of the need to compromise with energy by limiting it and allowing it exercise in terms of particular tensions.

Our final discussion of form in literature is by way of transition to its relationship with language and meaning. The major instruments which the ego possesses for the purpose of containing energy are time, space, convention, and logic. The id possesses none of these. They are the means of locating psychic energy within the focus of reality. Each of them is both specific and ambiguous. In simplest terms each arrests energy by shaping it, or shapes it in the act of arresting it. If we could imagine the id with a time sense at all, it would be a future sense -- that is, the drive toward total gratification is pure future, and leads, if not inhibited, to death. The ego's function is to arrest future by means of past, to make the present moment a unity of past and future. The result of this process is to slow down the drive toward death; and in consequence, moments are realized and both addition and formal patterns of time are constructed. Similarly, the ego gives spatial concepts to the energy discharge; in the matter of time and space both, the ego localizes, forces the psychic energy into an awareness of milieu. Milieu is itself a product of objective temporal and spatial situations. Freud's elaborate discussions of the familial origins and progress of societies should concern us here, but they will have only to be assumed. (See Totem and Taboo, The Ego and the Id, Moses and Monotheism; see especially Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, Boston, Beacon Press, 1955). It may be of some interest here to point to the range of psychoanalytic evaluations of milieu. Freud's is hypothetical, but only in the sense of generalizing historically from proven recurrences; a family centered milieu is in Freud's case derived from clinical practices, the interpretation based upon inferences from personal cases. I think that here we may see the source of what we may call "family-centered literature," in which formal controls are defined in terms of manners. (Cfr. Buddenbrooks and The Magic Mountain). Jung's milieu, though also an inference from a kind of therapeutic procedure, is nevertheless extremely wide in its range of descriptive implication. Neither conception of milieu is especially noted for its relationship to contemporary social or societal fact, a fact that other analysts are eager to assert. The literary implications of both Freud's and Jung's views are allied with universals, but Freud's universals are at least easier to associate with the particulars at their source. To continue with the discussion of the four terms, convention is a form of the human history of time and space as inhibiting factors. It is the most flexible, the least firm of all the forms of awareness which the ego uses to arrest the progress toward uninhibited gratification. Nevertheless, it may achieve great significance in literature. There is often a close link of social and moral convention with literary form. Convention is the social logic of literary usage. Logic itself is the final restriction imposed upon the psychic energy expressed in the id. There are basic logical principles common to an external world from which the ego draws its reserves of inhibition. These principles are largely either negating or qualifying; that is, they exclude (if this, then not this), or negate (not this), or prescribe (this and not this). Every grammatical detail is an index, a sign, of the inhibition which anticipates form; but as such it may also be a clue to the aesthetic means of articulating psychic balance.

In so arbitrarily stating the formal conditions of inhibition, I have tried to set the stage for the final phase of my discussion. I should maintain that ambiguity, word-play, and what Philip Wheelwright has called "plurisignation" are primarily a part of the process constantly occurring in the psyche which seeks to achieve an articulate balance of tensions between desire and preservation. The id is neither logical nor illogical; it is prelogical until it comes in contact with the ego or the ego with it. After that it acquires the devices of logic but makes them serve its own purposes. The balance in literature between the logical and the contradictory, between single and multiple meanings, is the substance of the very lively tension existing and verbalized between energy and form. Freud's description of the

dream work is now so well known that I don't need to give it in detail; chapter seven of The Interpretation of Dreams is its initial formulation, and there are many explanations of it, by Freud and by others. I should like to infer from them what seems to me a statement important to literary criticism: every ambiguity purposefully introduced into literature is in one way or another a compromise between uninhibited energy and extreme formal inhibition. It is impossible to decide the ideal degree of ambiguity, but one may, I think, assume that the forms of ambiguity reflect both degrees of tension and conditions of balance within the psyche. There are levels, of course, of sophistication. In children there is a fairly free play of wish and inhibition, contained within a limited number of metaphorical possibilities. Alice is after all Lewis Carroll's Alice and not Alice's. James's Maisie assumes the complexities of adulthood by necessity. In a great majority of adults the containment of energy is achieved in a relatively small number of rather abstract, though sentimentally overcharged, figures. The kinds of paradox and irony achieved by Donne, Marvell, Herbert, and others represent a highly endowed sense of the ambiguities residing in such tensions. Indeed, in the case of Donne the figures employed to express them reach a very high level of complexity, the purpose of which is both to individualize desire and to give it a degree of sophistication. The ambiguities resulting may be said to come partly from a genuine appreciation of human corruptibility (both moral and physical), partly from a wish to defend desire by means of defying those who would cynically dismiss it, partly from contemporary religious and metaphysical resources for transcendence. Such paradox is a result of the need both to admit a truth and at the same time to use available forms of transcendence in order to deny it; the admission and the denial are fused. Corruption becomes death, but death is contained within forms so successful in negating physical death that it triumphs over cynicism ("Only our love hath no decay," "The Anniversary," St. 1, l. 7). Similarly, the paradox of time and eternity may function within a poem; necessities forced upon us by time are denied by transforming the temporal into aspects of eternity. Yet the limits set by time (by which we narrowly view the corruption of the body as it "matures") are in themselves contained within the image of eternity; indeed, were it not for time, we should not have eternity. The complex nature of much religious poetry probably results from the inter-relationship in each of us between our sense of physical instability and our desire for immortality; as for the latter, each of us has his own variant of it. Immortality is the ultimate formalization of desire; we continue to desire but come to realize that if we persist we shall die. To wish immortality is to hope for a removal of the reality principle, with a considerable gain in refinement of the pleasure principle. In the poetry of Laforgue and Corbière there is occasionally an attempt to set up ideally foreshortened versions of the id and either to satirize them ("Mélange adultère du tout") or to use them ("Locutions des Pierrots") as a means of satirizing, not the fact of ego-control in itself, but the prevailing accepted forms of control. Satire usually protests against the contemporary ways used by the ego to inhibit. In surrealism, and occasionally in the work of Rimbaud, there is an attempt to represent the id pure -- or at least to allow the manifest dream content a free display -- with the result that the literature describes, not a balance of tension but merely the consequence of a superficial exposure of wish to the idiom of ego.

The greatest range and the finest subtlety of all language exchanges based upon this principle of energy conflict and conservation are found in those types of communication described so brilliantly by Philip Wheelwright, in The Burning Fountain (Indiana U.P. 1954), as forms of "expressive language." I should like to use one or two of these, with the apology that I shall shift their context, perhaps even radically, from that of his intention. Mr. Wheelwright defines what he calls the "principle of plurisignation" as meaning "that an expressive symbol tends, on any given occasion of its realization, to carry more than one legitimate reference, in such a way that its proper meaning is a tension between two or more directions of semantic stress." (61) That is, in terms I have chosen to explain it, that the language of the symbol retains the charge and tension of its psychic origins, or of the dynamic shifts and exchanges of the energy which it was before the state was articulated. The many possibilities of stress, of direction, of painful thrust and arrest, are here echoed in the multiplications of meaning within a given image, metaphor, or cluster of images. This symbolic maneuver is accessible to a great variety of strategies: the poet may wish to exploit the irony he sees in his state of acceptance-rejection (that is, he may accept only ostensibly, or reject only ostensibly, but he ironically juxtaposes both acceptance and rejection in his language.) I believe we may say that Eliot both accepts and rejects. He sees as well the pathetic consequences of pure acceptance or of pure rejection. Herein lies the almost too easy irony of some of his poems. The polarities are perhaps too neatly obvious; and the deficiencies of both Prufrock and Sweeney are too much derived from circumstances that forbid transcendence. Eliot's great admiration of Dante seems to me to have come from his recognizing in Dante a means of escaping from the dead ends of Prufrock and Sweeney, as well as from the forbidding milieu responsible for them. The Paradiso is prefigured in the Inferno; a terrestrial inferno, such as Eliot describes in the early poems can suggest a purgatory and a heaven only by an act of daring transcendence, an act which of course Eliot attempted. Or the poet may wish to express the tragedy of acceptance which lies in its inevitability (that is, acceptance of control is most unwished for but not in the least uncalled for); or he may extend the ambiguity to such an extent that it makes a virtue of transcendence (the effort to create a viable mystic exchange out of a condition of stasis, behavioral or mechanical).

Mr. Wheelwright speaks also of what he calls the "principle of paralogical dimensionality," by which he wishes to suggest "that there are other dimensions or nodi of meaning than those of logical universality and existential particularity. . . ." (64) The logical dimension is presumably that which restricts and limits within the strict terms of discernible reality. But, as I see it, this dimension is indispensable as a beginning; one must see what a thing is before he determines the scope and degree of its not being or of its being more. The co-ordinates of reality and desire are first set up, with such dimensional angularity as we are prosaically accustomed to use. The "paralogical dimensionality" of expressive language, as Mr. Wheelwright puts it, is nourished by the dissatisfactions accumulating from this initial effort at compromise. As the dream work refuses to accept either-or, the language of the

poet suggests a multiple of meanings from a state of tension. There are several ways in which such a state may be true (effectual, "healthful," conducive of peace), several in which it may be false. These variants are all contained within the single linguistic or metaphoric representation of a state of balanced tension.

Finally, one must consider the problem of associating the most intricate of literary expressions with Jung's archetypes. The access to myth in recent criticism is at least partly a product of research, or of a quest of mythical surrogates for displaced symbols. The elaborate structure provided by Jung for the purpose of linking individual present with collective past is useful only in that it suggests the extremes to which the imagination may go in generalizing immediate necessities and experiences. But archetypes, beyond the service they perform in cataloguing and arranging, are actually the most inflexible of forms. They may, in fact, arrest the process of articulating psychic tensions and they may oversimplify the results. Whatever one may say by way of crediting Jung's ingenuity and the vigor of his imagination, the archetypal process, by enlarging and depersonalizing the expressive experience, threatens to destroy both its individuality and its complexity. The appeal to literature and to literary criticism of Jung's archaic forms and residues is, of course, phenomenally great; and it is necessary to explain just what the archetype does to the act of literary creation.

First, the process of verbalizing, of constructing linguistic expressions of any psycho-dynamic state follows along the lines of its own logic. This is not a transcendent logic; it is as complex as the circumstances require and permit. Within the limits seen and set by Freud, transcendence of the actual condition set up by psychic tensions and balances always remains closely associated with them and takes on their quality. Metaphors used to define such states are always individualized according to terms set down by the experiences determined by them.

It follows that the particularities of psychic experiences lend themselves to the act of universalizing. But the universals follow from a commonalty of basic experience, or of basic sources from which the secondary qualities of experience are drawn. To the degree that they may form clusters about a static symbol, they may be called archetypes. The danger is that one will abandon the particular for the archetypal. Once an experience is defined as "shared archetype," its particulars are threatened by dismissal. This indeed is often Jung's therapeutic aim, as I see it.

The advantages of Jung's archetypal portrayal of the collective psyche for literary criticism come primarily from its being available to an almost infinite range of spectacular inference. If poets unconsciously share archetypal interests, and if critics can bring themselves to commune with poets in the sharing, then the lines of tradition, of a discernible past discernibly associated with a felt present, are blurred. There is a great difference between a tradition of the ritual observance of a fixed symbolic and mythical pattern and the direct, knowledgeable, ingenious, overt use of myth in modern literature. To explain present literary circumstance by reference to archetypal patterns is to ignore the peculiarities of present practice and need. To say that basically we are linked to the past by archetypal means is to describe falsely the particular nature of our hunger for transcendence. The desire for credible and trustworthy universals is after all, and peculiarly, a feature of our contemporary behavior. It is not that the desire is unique, but that its special properties are. In rationally undermining the foundations of our past belief, we have put ourselves in an especially compromising position. We do not submit to any archetypes entirely, but we do love to entertain all of them, as poetic means and as mythical experiences that are half-real and half merely "curious."

This peculiarity of our modern circumstance is especially well served by Jung, who serves artists by rescuing them from an unflattering Freudian diagnosis and giving them the role of seer, prophetic bard, guardian of the temple, neighbor of the mystic. Such a characterization makes any analysis of the literary process such as I have sketched impractical and unnecessary. Inspiration is no longer available to psychological explanation, or at least psychological or indeed any other kind of explanation is unnecessary to it. Jung's elaborate system has tried, therefore, to satisfy a great hunger for transcendence. Transcendence, however, is difficult. Jung has tried to make of it a therapeutic necessity, the extreme of psychiatric indulgence. The language of Jung's discourses moves further and further from Freud's cautions; the psychoanalyst becomes priest, "godlike demon," dispenser of positive power, caretaker of archetypes.

To conclude, Freud's meticulously correct choreography of the unconscious maintains the advantages of its discretion. Language in all of its scope of meanings and half-meanings and super-meanings may fit into his remarkable analysis of the psychic economy. The ambiguities of our language are the push-and-pull of our intelligence, alternating between residence in the id and regretful acceptance of the ego. While we may find types of identity with the past, we are not what we were some thousands of years ago; however tempting it is to suggest archetypal identifications, our psychic peculiarities are in the end available only to the sober testimony of systematic investigation. To say otherwise is to ignore both the dilemma and the specific intelligence of our times.

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FREUD'S WRITINGS ON ART

I

Of all the scientific disciplines psychoanalysis has most in common with art. Both seek an understanding of the human spirit by directly observing man's actions and words as manifestations of his innermost needs conditioned by the exigencies of his body and of the world he lives in. Art, of course, is wider-ranging than any branch of science for it explores not only the secrets of the personality but the moral significance of the universe. Psychoanalysis, not so ambitious, restricts itself to what man perceives, imagines and feels. It does not attempt the problem of the cosmos but merely that of man's conception of the cosmos. Its concern with art is not with the nature of The Beautiful but with what man considers beautiful and with why he so considers it. There is no fully developed psychoanalytic theory of aesthetics, although there are psychoanalytic studies of some of the constituent elements of aesthetic experiences. Psychoanalysis is aware of its limitations as a branch of biology whose special province is the scientific study of mental functioning. Any theories which it offers to explain phenomena, especially outside these limits, are intended to be taken as proposals subject to clinical verification and not as dogmatic assertions of revealed truth.

Without invading the territory of the philosophers by judging the intrinsic worth or weakness of the moral law, psychoanalysis exercises its right to investigate it as something which man has produced and which therefore can, when properly comprehended, throw light upon his mental life. From this standpoint it is similarly interested in law, politics, education, religion--and even in itself. The evaluation of man's life and works in philosophical, social, economic or anthropological terms it leaves to the appropriate disciplines. It wishes to know only out of what psychic needs they arose, what psychic materials they use, how they use these and what psychic purpose they fulfill. Every human thought or action can be made to serve as a lens which, when correctly focused, will make visible its psychic origins and the paths of its development. Art, too, is accessible to such study.

Looked at in this way it discloses a great deal about those experiences of the artist which have achieved artistic expression and about their communication, by the medium of art, to others. Art is a record of the gifted; it translates events and the artist's reflections upon them into forms by which they can be transmitted symbolically. But it is not simply a message in code. It preserves (in modified form) and creates again and again on demand an experience, or rather the aesthetic equivalent of an experience, which has brought satisfaction to its author and is capable of bringing a corresponding pleasure to its audience. Literature, whose medium, like that of psychoanalysis, is language, lends itself readily to scientific investigation without the necessity of constructing a new symbolic foundation. While Freud was interested in other arts, it is not surprising, therefore, that he freely and familiarly used literature, biography and criticism to support and illustrate his psychology.

This paper is a study of what Freud actually wrote on art in all of his published works. Although he never produced a complete exposition of the subject, contenting himself with occasional passing references to it and with a small number of studies of specific works and artists, the scattered fragments here gathered together display complete consistency with the principles of psychoanalysis as it developed during his lifetime. A proper understanding of his writings on art, therefore, demands a grasp of nothing less than the whole of psychoanalysis. This is true not only because what he wrote specifically about art requires such a background but also because many of the psychoanalytic concepts which he never applied to artistic problems himself nevertheless have such applicability.

From the earliest days of psychoanalysis to the very end of his career Freud turned frequently to literary art and to the lives of literary men for elucidation and example. The small number of workers in the new field--for a number of years Freud was the only psychoanalyst--meant that the quantity of clinical information was small; additions from non-clinical but reliable sources were welcome. But more important than that was the growing isolation in which Freud found himself after the violent initial rejection--without benefit of scientific checking--of his discovery that the psychoneuroses had a sexual origin. Whether he intended it so or not, there is no doubt that literary corroboration of certain psychoanalytic observations lent some of the prestige of established art to the embryonic science which was undergoing the painful but apparently inevitable process of being first unreasonably attacked and thereafter consigned to limbo. The world did not thank him for disturbing its sleep; he withdrew from the struggle and consoled himself with advancing his work, at first alone, later with a few followers. To this consolation literature also contributed.

*/ This article is adapted from an article of the same title in The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, XXXVII, I (1955).

One of the earliest parallels Freud found in literature was Othello's outburst of rage at Desdemona's loss of the handkerchief. He used it to illustrate the process of displacement of affect in which "ideas of feeble potential, by taking over the charge from ideas which have a stronger initial potential, reach a degree of intensity which enables them to force themselves into consciousness." ¹ Art, of course, was not Freud's sole source of illustrative material; he gives several other, non-literary, examples in the same passage. He often employed it, however, to supplement extra-clinical observations as well as the direct products of psychoanalytic research.

The high regard Freud felt for the psychological acuity of artists often appears in his works. Not only does he praise them for their accurate observations but he also frequently gives them credit for discovering certain phenomena before these became evident to scientists, himself included. His "disconcerting discovery" that the very earliest experiences have a strong influence upon later life, for instance, was also to be found in E.T.A. Hoffmann who

used to explain the wealth of imaginative figures that offered themselves to him for his stories by the quickly changing pictures and impressions he had received during a journey in a post-chaise, lasting several weeks, while he was still a babe at his mother's breast. ²

The psychological observations of the artist, however, are not the direct equivalent of those made by the psychologist, the differences in the situation and intent of the two being so great. We shall see that Freud did not take every such report at face value. His psychoanalytic experiences had taught him caution and given him remarkable skill in estimating the objective reliability of such data.

Freud followed the practice of drawing upon literary sources throughout his life. In his last book he turns to literary biography for an illustration of the return of the repressed, with the remark that "even the great Goethe, who in his Sturm und Drang period certainly did not respect his pedantic and stiff father very highly, developed in his old age traits that belonged to his father's character." ³

These scattered specimens show the readiness with which literature and its auxiliaries occurred to Freud as illustrative matter for his frequently difficult expositions. Most of his examples were taken from dreams, jokes, myths, customs or the mental phenomena of everyday life, but art, especially literature, supplied a natural abundance of materials for a man who had been educated in Vienna in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Of greater significance than such allusions was the active enlistment of the psychological insights of artists in support of psychoanalytic findings. We have noted that Freud thought artists better able than ordinary people to see into human motivations and actions. The accuracy and keenness of their observations was so great that it frequently permitted him to use their creations in much the same way that he used clinical records. The two are, of course, not exactly equivalent, and Freud was careful to distinguish between fictional and "scientific" elements in the material he chose. Within limits, however, the practice was valid, and proved useful as long as confusion of the real with the contrived was avoided.

Slips of the tongue, although popularly regarded as accidental and meaningless, nevertheless had a meaning whose import had not escaped the poets, for, as Freud shows by examples from Schiller's Wallenstein and Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, they sometimes constructed such slips intentionally. ⁴ The character into whose mouth a slip was put was thus represented as blurting out something which he was consciously trying to conceal, precisely what happens in everyday life. Freud went further than that. He wrote that even if slips did not have the significance which he attributed to them, "poets would still be entitled to refine them by infusing sense into them for their own purposes. However, it would not be surprising if more were to be learned from poets about slips of the tongue than from philologists and psychiatrists." ⁵ Even granting the artist's license to modify reality for aesthetic purposes, Freud found in literature a discernment and an honesty which were not always present in the work of the psychiatrists of his day. Many of them had closed their minds to the phenomena which artists and others had observed and which psychoanalysts were now beginning to study systematically. The reports of the poets, moreover, were frequently found to be in accord with what had been ascertained clinically, as in the matter of slips of the tongue.

¹ Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. A.A. Brill, (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 81.

² Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism, trans. Katherine Jones, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), p. 199.

³ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, (New York: The Modern Library, 1958), pp. 84-85.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, trans. Joan Riviere, (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Company, 1943), p. 35.

Poetic insights could be much more complex than this and still retain their scientific validity, as Freud was able strikingly to demonstrate in the work of Wilhelm Jensen, a minor romancer, whose Gradiva: A Pompeian Fancy unwittingly corroborated the psychoanalytic view of dreams and delusions. Freud's masterpiece, The Interpretation of Dreams, had been completed in all its essentials in the early part of 1896, although it was not written down until 1899 and published in the following year. Gradiva appeared in 1903. When a member of the Vienna psychoanalytic group brought it to his attention Freud found its correspondence with his theories to be so close that he published a psychoanalytic study of its characters. ⁶ His main point, worked out in elaborate detail, is that dreams and other mental processes contrived by writers for literary purposes, when drawn as directly as possible from the inner springs of the creative imagination, present the same picture of psychic life that psychoanalysis does. Allowance must, of course, be made for mutations which the material undergoes in the aesthetic process. "I have made use of this agreement between my investigations and the creations of the poet," wrote Freud, "as a proof of the correctness of my method of dream-analysis." ⁷ From this point of view "Delusion and Dream" may be regarded as a supplement to The Interpretation of Dreams, but it also casts light upon certain artistic problems.

The first of these is whether fictional dreams have any real meaning at all. Freud's answer is that they do:

For when [authors] cause the people created by their imagination to dream, they follow the common experience that people's thoughts and feelings continue into sleep, and they seek only to depict the psychic states of their heroes through the dreams of the latter. Story tellers are valuable allies, and their testimony is to be rated high, for they usually know many things between heaven and earth that our academic wisdom does not even dream of. In psychic knowledge, indeed, they are far ahead of us ordinary people because they draw from sources that we have not yet made accessible for science. ⁸

Freud holds that writers possess a heightened sensitivity that enables them to apprehend their own psychic processes more readily than most people can. The dreams which they invent come from the same sources as real dreams and are therefore subject to the laws which govern the latter, with the single and important qualification that such invented dreams are at the same time subject to the laws of artistic necessity. In the analysis of a fictional dream these two aspects must be sharply distinguished and each set of laws applied only to its appropriate portions of the dream. Psychic reality and aesthetic reality may be mingled but should never be confused. It follows, then, that the dream devised by an author, if it is not distorted by extraneous forces, has validity not only for the imaginary character who "dreams" it but for science as well.

The same holds true for other mental processes, delusions, for instance: One could raise one more question: why the author [Jensen] should introduce a dream for further development of the delusion. Well, I think that is very cleverly arranged and again keeps faith with reality. We have already heard that in actual illness the formation of a delusion is very often connected with a dream, but after our explanation of the nature of dreams we need find no new riddle in this fact. Dreams and delusions spring from the same source, the repressed; the dream is, so to speak, the physiological delusion of the normal human being. ⁹

Even the method by which the clever heroine cures the hero of his delusion "shows a considerable resemblance, no, complete agreement, essentially, with [psychoanalysis]." ¹⁰ Such remarkable accord could not be dismissed as mere coincidence.

At this point there naturally arose the problem whether Jensen knew Freud's theories when he wrote Gradiva. The question was accordingly put to him and "our author answered, as was to be expected, in the negative, and rather testily." Freud later obtained much the same reply--without the testiness--from his friend Stephan Zweig who assured him that he was not aware of any scientific foundation for the psychic details in one of his stories, although to Freud it seemed almost as if they had been deliberately intended to provide clues to its interpretation. Evidently the adherence of an author to the principles of mental functioning need not be conscious; his intuition is often enough. Even if he denies all knowledge of the rules, and protests that he did not have the intentions which are imputed to him, Freud holds that his good faith need not be questioned: "We are probably drawing from the same source, working over the same material, each of us with a different method, and agreement in results seems to vouch for the fact that both have worked correctly." ¹¹ Instead of inhibiting his fantasies by the exercise of his critical faculties, the author has permitted them to achieve artistic expression. The actions of his characters embody the laws of the mind's operation whether he has learned them consciously or otherwise, whether he is aware of knowing them or not.

6/ Sigmund Freud, "Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen's Gradiva," trans. Helen M. Downey, in Delusion and Dream (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1917) pp. 121-243. The first part of the book contains a translation of Gradiva.

7/ The Interpretation of Dreams, Op. Cit., p. 9n.

8/ "Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen's Gradiva," Op. Cit., p. 113.

9/ Ibid., pp. 198-199.

10/ Ibid., p. 235.

11/ Ibid., p. 240.

With the final product before him the psychoanalyst is often able to traverse the same path from its end back to its beginning, thus arriving at the author's sources in the psyche. In this way the laws of mental functioning may be demonstrated from an examination of fiction just as they may from an analysis of any human production which provides enough clues.

There is nothing surprising in this. The writer has always searched for and described the inner story of man, and he has shown a high degree of accuracy in doing so. "The portrayal of the psychic life of human beings is, of course, his most especial domain; he was always the precursor of science and of scientific psychology." ¹² The same theme, therefore, may legitimately be investigated by both author and psychologist. The aesthetic requirements of its treatment by the former sometimes results in changes from what has been observed or in departures from probability which either destroy or greatly minimize its clinical value, but the scientist must, like everyone else, freely grant the artist's license. It is possible, however, for a theme from psychology to be used unchanged in literature without detracting from its aesthetic effectiveness. In this respect science need not necessarily interfere with art. The ability of the psychologist to discriminate between artistic insights which may be used to supplement clinical observations and those which have been aesthetically altered is the prerequisite for a study such as Freud made of *Gradiva*.

The most famous instance of the psychological acuteness of writers is the regular appearance in world literature of the dramatic theme whose psychoanalytic manifestation Freud named the Oedipus complex. Though he gradually came to see its ubiquity in human affairs he was puzzled by the poets' choice of invention of "such a terrible subject" and by its great effectiveness in dramatic form.

But all of this became intelligible when one realized that a universal law of mental life had here been captured in all its emotional significance. Fate and the oracle were no more than materializations of an internal necessity; and the fact of the hero sinning without his knowledge and against his intentions was evidently a right expression of the unconscious nature of his criminal tendencies. ¹³

The discovery of the Oedipus complex had arisen out of Freud's self-analysis and had been confirmed by his work with patients; by 1897 he held it to be "a universal occurrence of early childhood."

If this is so, then one can understand the moving power of King Oedipus in spite of all the objections which are raised against the destiny-hypothesis by our critical faculty....The Greek saga fastens upon one compulsion with which everyone is familiar for he has felt its existence within himself. Each person in the audience was once potentially and in fantasy such an Oedipus, and before the distorted dream-fulfillment which is thus brought into reality everyone shudders back with the full force of the repression which separates his infantile constitution from his present one.

The question has passed briefly through my mind whether the same thing may not be fundamentally true of Hamlet. I am not thinking of Shakespeare's conscious intention, but rather believe that an actual experience of the poet impelled him to the production in which the unconscious in him understood the unconscious in his hero. How does the hysteric, Hamlet, justify the remark, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all," how does he, the same man who unconcernedly sends his courtiers to their deaths and actually impetuously murders Laertes, explain his delay in avenging the murder of his father by his uncle? ¹⁴

Freud concludes that Hamlet's arm is held back by his unconscious sense that he is guilty of wishing for the very things that Claudius has achieved, the death of his father and the possession of his mother. He cannot punish Claudius; vengeance would be equivalent to suicide, and until the end of the play he is not ready for that.

The omnipresence of the Oedipus complex accounts for its frequent employment in literature where it achieves its most moving expression at the hands of masters like Sophocles and Shakespeare. Freud conjectured that the actual writing of *Hamlet* was motivated by an event in Shakespeare's life, namely the death of his father, which reactivated his dormant infantile feelings. Later he added to this the effect of the death of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, with nearly the same name as the play's hero. There is no further evidence for this, but clinical experience lends considerable weight to the guess since such a sequence has many parallels in psychoanalytic research.

12/ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

13/ Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, trans. James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 117.

14/ Sigmund Freud, *Aus Den Anfängen Der Psychoanalyse*, (London: Imago Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 238-239. My translation. An English translation has since appeared: *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, (New York: Basic Books, 1954).

Although confirmatory information from Shakespeare's life is not available to us, we are most fortunate as regards other writers. One of the most fascinating applications of psychoanalysis which suggested itself to Freud was the study of the lives of artists and the reconstruction by its aid of certain meagerly documented episodes from them. He had already shown in his analysis of *Gradiva* that dreams invented by writers are to be regarded psychoanalytically like real dreams. He extended this kind of research further in the case of four important artists, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevski and Leonardo da Vinci.

Freud's studies of these individuals are fragmentary and consist primarily of analyses of behavior and motivation. The focus is upon these and not upon problems of art, with the single major exception of the reason why the artist elects to treat certain themes. His conclusion is that the artist is a gifted and sensitive person, sometimes neurotic and sometimes not, but governed by the same inner forces that rule the rest of mankind.

Besides these brief excursions into the nooks and crannies of biography, Freud now and then occupied himself with the examination of certain works of art from the standpoint of their manifest content and what this revealed about the latent impulses which had in part motivated their creation. He was interested not only in the inner life of the artist but also in the artistic treatment of certain themes whose appearance in his patients he was studying psychoanalytically. He had found them also in legend and mythology and was intrigued by the fact that writers and plastic artists had often dealt with the same material. Since he valued the insight of their creators into motivation and behavior, he scrutinized these works with a clinical eye, proceeding in a manner analogous to the technique of dream interpretation or the analysis of neurotic symptoms, in order to find, if he could, what lay behind the finished product. The results further corroborated his psychoanalytic discoveries.

His methods were applicable equally to literature, painting and sculpture, studies in the latter two being of particular interest. Starting with a childhood memory recorded in the journal of Leonardo da Vinci and utilizing all available material, he reconstructed the probable basic pattern of Leonardo's psychic life and traced its influence upon his career as reflected in his works. Freud showed how the investigative impulse became unusually strong in the artist's childhood, how it entered the service of his art, how later it dominated and finally replaced the latter so that for a time Leonardo was a scientist and engineer rather than a painter, and how in the later years it subsided so as to permit painting once more.

He described the fascination of Mona Lisa's smile and suggested the possibility that it was a reminder to Leonardo of the smile of his own mother, which appeared again in the picture of Saint John and on the faces of both women in the painting of Sainte Anne, Mary, and the Holy Infant. Freud interpreted the latter work as an unconsciously motivated representation of Leonardo's real mother, the peasant woman who had borne him illegitimately, and of his father's barren wife who had taken the boy from her and brought him up in her husband's home. The childhood group of two mothers and infant son was an idealization of Leonardo's own history, both real and fantasied--the father is conspicuously absent. No less significant was the portrait of the handsome youth Saint John with the same enigmatic conformation of the mouth. The power which enabled Leonardo to use his skill as artist and scientist in the way that he did was attributed by Freud to his legacy of love from his mother, the happiness of which remained always with him, although sometimes hidden or finding expression in strangely turned fashion. Childhood memories and fantasies, mythology, religion and the conventions of Renaissance portraiture are integrated effectively in these paintings. All can contribute their clues to our psychic understanding.

Sculpture yielded even more than painting in the case of Michelangelo's statue of Moses, though here the biography of the artist was of less assistance. A close examination of the work itself, which Freud greatly admired, produced all the necessary information. The method used was the scrutiny of details rather than the over-all conception. By comparing the treatment of ear lobes, fingernails, and such trivia he was able to find discrepancies and to establish identities which could not be detected by an examination of mere composition or color values. Such an approach suited psychoanalysis exactly; it too found meanings--often decisive ones--in unconsidered trifles. Using this method Freud set out to see if he could determine Michelangelo's artistic intent.

By repeated painstaking observations of the statue itself Freud decided that the sculptor had wished to represent a particular moment in the life of Moses as imaginatively reconstructed by the artist. That was the moment in which Moses was beginning to master the anger he felt at seeing his people worshipping the golden calf when he came down from Sinai with the Tables of the Law. By analyzing the position of the hands, the beard and the Tables, Freud interpreted the statue as depicting the traces of passion left as Moses began to recover his composure, "the remains of a movement that has already taken place."

In his first transport of fury, Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tables; but he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still in his frozen wrath and in his pain mingled with contempt. Nor will he throw away the Tables so that they will break upon the stones, for it is on their especial account that he has controlled his anger; it was to preserve them that he kept his passion in check. In giving way to his rage and indignation he had to neglect the Tables, and the hand which upheld them was withdrawn. They began to slide down and were in danger of being broken. This brought him to himself. He remembered his mission and renounced

for its sake an indulgence of his feelings. His hand returned and saved the unsupported Tables before they had actually fallen to the ground. In this attitude he remained immobilized, and in this attitude Michelangelo has portrayed him as the guardian of the tomb....He has modified the theme of the broken Tables; he does not let Moses break them in his wrath, but makes him be influenced by the danger that they will be broken and calm that wrath, or at any rate prevent it from becoming an act. In this way he has added something new and more than human to the figure of Moses; so that the giant frame with its tremendous physical power becomes only a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself. /15

To such an end psychoanalysis itself is directed, its ultimate goal being to establish the dominance of our moral natures over the might of our instinctual energies. As Freud succinctly put it, "Where Id was, there shall Ego be," and something very like this must have been in the mind of the sculptor.

Only twice did Freud essay such detailed analyses of painting and sculpture; most of his application of psychoanalysis to art was in the field of literature. There the presentation of the themes which interested him was on the whole more explicit and lent itself more readily to study, being closer to the kind of material which he obtained from his patients. Very early in the history of psychoanalysis he had been impressed with the importance of the feelings clustering around the relationship of children and their parents. He soon found that a disturbance in the normal development of his relationship was at the root of the neuroses. Conversely, a successful surmounting of the problems of this difficult period was the prerequisite for a normal adult life. In fact, the key to an immense area of psychic behavior lay in this constellation of affects which he came to call the Oedipus complex. Thus the profound effect of the ancient drama of Oedipus lay in its ability to reawaken in us the persistent but hidden emotions which in the earliest forms had accompanied our upbringing by our parents or their surrogates.

Freud pointed out that dreams of having sexual intercourse with the mother and killing the father had been known from antiquity; such dreams were also reported by his patients "with indignation and astonishment," but attendant feelings of horror and revulsion did not prevent them from occurring. The continuing reappearance of themes which are so repugnant to our conscious selves indicates their power, and their power indicates their importance. They refer to "the painful disturbance of the child's relations to its parents caused by the first impulses of sexuality." The naive wishes of the child for direct gratification are abruptly modified by reality and relegated to unconsciousness. In this state they lose none of their potential force and continually seek expression, compelling the psyche to expend large quantities of energy in order to prevent their emergence. In this it is not always successful. One of the ways in which these forbidden desires manage, at least partially, to circumvent the effort to keep them unconscious--that is, repressed--is through the agency of the dream, a more or less direct representation of psychic reality. The two typical dreams growing out of the fundamental relationship of the child to its father and mother, fortified and amended by suitable fantasies and thoughts, are believed by Freud to have furnished the raw material first for the legend and then the drama which gave the phenomenon its modern name, the Oedipus Rex of Sophocles.

The play is often regarded solely as a drama of fate, the conflict of the will of the gods with the puny and fated efforts of humans to escape disaster, but Freud saw this view as "the result of an uncomprehending secondary elaboration of the material which sought to make it serve a theological intention." The original psychic conflict took place between the child's desires and the necessity for it voluntarily to thwart them, a situation which contains the germ of all drama. Freud realized that Sophocles was compelled for dramatic reasons to portray Oedipus as being unaware that he was doing wrong. This does not add to the original content of the legend and remains faithful to psychological truth. Therefore destiny in the philosophical or religious sense need not be assumed as the motivating force of the drama. From the psychological point of view, it serves as a screen behind and through which the real human quality of the tragedy is discernible. What the playwright has given us is

a legitimate representation of the unconsciousness into which, for adults, the whole experience has fallen; and the doom of the oracle, which makes or should make the hero innocent, is a recognition of the inevitability of the fate which has condemned every son to live through the Oedipus complex. /16

This accounts for the power of the play to grip even modern minds. We are all, in a sense, victims of the same curse, and the recognition of its fulfillment in another arouses in us the same combination of revulsion and fascination from which the hero is suffering. Through the skill of the playwright we are once more made to feel the delicious and horrifying reverberations of our uncompleted struggle for self-mastery. The fate of Oedipus moves us "because it might have been our own."

15/ Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo," trans. Alix Strachey, Collected Papers, (London: Hogarth Press, 1946), IV, pp. 279-280.

16/ Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949), pp. 95-96.

In 1928 Freud once again took up the theme of father-murder in literature in connection with The Brothers Karamazov, which he ranked with Oedipus Rex and Hamlet as one of the "masterpieces of the literature of all time." The point of this juxtaposition was that all three dealt with parricide, and all three revealed the motive as rivalry for sexual possession of a woman. However, Freud pointed out, the artist could not present it as openly as a case-history, for that would have been intolerable. Sophocles accomplishes "the indispensable toning-down" by transforming the hero's unconscious motive into the compulsion of destiny imposed upon him by the irresistible gods. Once his crimes have been revealed to him, Oedipus accepts his own guilt and punishment without seeking exculpation of the seemingly reasonable ground that it was none of his conscious doing. While this violates our conception of justice, it satisfies psychological requirements. The combination of his unconscious wish to commit the forbidden deeds and the proof that he had actually committed them made it inevitable that Oedipus would not try to evade the responsibility. He was overwhelmed with horror and remorse; punishment was absolutely essential.

In Hamlet the crime is committed by Claudius, for whom it is parricide symbolically, not actually; the motive therefore can be shown more openly, and he marries the Queen. Hamlet's turmoil is caused by the reactivation in him of the guilty desires for which he unconsciously wishes to be punished. He feels not only his own unworthiness to avenge his father but his sharing of unworthiness with all men. "Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?"

The Brothers Karamazov goes further in the same direction. The crime is committed not by the hero, Alyosha, but by Smerdyakov, an illegitimate son of the same father. All the brothers, however, share the guilt, for all more or less openly desire the same thing and, in a measure, overtly contrive to make it possible. Ivan prepares the way by persuading Smerdyakov that there is no God and therefore nothing to restrain or punish the murderer. Dmitri is an example to the others of violently expressed hatred of his father whom he openly threatens to kill. Freud exempts Alyosha from the collective guilt, but there seems to be ample evidence in the novel that he, too, has not only unconsciously desired his father's death but also found it expedient not to heed Father Zossima's insistence that he keep close watch on Dmitri in order to prevent the crime which Zossima foresees. Again and again Alyosha finds other things which he feels he must do before he can perform the duty laid on him by his beloved elder. One of these is a visit to a woman--to the woman.

Freud's interest in the literary treatment of this theme is epitomized in his studies of Oedipus Rex, Hamlet and The Brothers Karamazov. He saw it first of all as support for his conception of the universality of the Oedipus complex. In this way it provided valuable assistance to psychoanalysis when help from respectable sources was most needed. He showed the necessity for the presence of such material in literature and art and for its alteration into forms acceptable to audiences. Tentatively in the case of Shakespeare and with greater assurance in that of Dostoevsky he established connections between the artist and his work, between the psychic life of the writer and the characters or actions depicted in the play or novel. Freud's concerns were with the central theme of normal human development and the dramatic values of the vicissitudes which it so often undergoes.

The first work analyzed by Freud from the psychoanalytic viewpoint was Die Richterin, by C.F. Meyer, which represented fictionally the feminine counterpart of the Oedipus complex, the incest theme for women. In commenting on the story, Freud used as a parallel the common fantasy of servant girls that they would get rid of the mistress of the house and then take her place in the affections of the master. The same pattern, more intricately worked out, also underlay the story of Rebecca Gamvik in Ibsen's Rosmersholm, to the analysis of which Freud devoted a large portion of his essay on character types. In the play Rebecca has driven the pastor's wife to suicide and has been living in an intellectual and ideal relationship with Rosmer for over a year. He proposes marriage to her, upon which she refuses him and threatens suicide. What had been so desirable before is now unendurable. The reason for this astonishing rejection of the fruits of her ruthless campaign for Rosmer soon appears.

Using Rebecca's own words, into which Ibsen has skillfully incorporated hints of the psychic truth, Freud reconstructs the story of her past. Briefly, it is that she has committed incest unknowingly by succeeding her mother as mistress of Dr. West, whom she discovers to be her own father. Her actions in the Rosmer household are an unconscious attempt to repeat this situation. When the second, the symbolic, incest approaches reality for Rebecca, the unconscious wish comes so close to realization that her guilt becomes unbearable. She has been able to tolerate the partial success of getting rid of Rosmer's wife, but the full impact of the forbidden wishes emerging into the open is too much for her. Freud remarks that the tragedy lies in the fact that her undefined guilt, by skillful dramatic revelation, is made specific. She is overwhelmed by the discovery of what she has done and by the recognition that she is on the brink of repeating it.

The representation of the same theme in Lady Macbeth presents a more difficult problem. She too is a woman who achieves success and soon thereafter suffers a disintegration of character. Freud is unable to explain why success is her downfall, but he makes a tentative suggestion. He begins with the motive for the murder of Duncan, which he ascribes not only to ambition but also to the desire to found a dynasty, to hand down the succession to Macbeth's children. Psychologically, the key to the actions of Macbeth and his lady is to be found in the father-and-children relationship. "The murder of the kindly Duncan is little else than parricide; in Banquo's case, Macbeth kills the father while the son escapes him; and he kills Macduff's children because the father has fled

from him." /17 But the prophecy of the weird sisters comes true. Lady Macbeth, as if in response to her own plea, is indeed unsexed, not only in that she becomes a steely-hearted murderess but also in that she remains barren. Thus the full profits of the crime are denied the unhappy King and Queen. As though by the law of talion their "crimes against the sanctity of geniture" are punished by childlessness. It is as if

Macbeth could not become a father because he had robbed children of their father and a father of his children, and as if Lady Macbeth had suffered the unsexing she had demanded of the spirits of murder. I believe one could without more ado explain the illness of Lady Macbeth, the transformation of her callousness into penitence, as a reaction to her childlessness, by which she is convinced of her impotence against the decrees of nature, and at the same time admonished that she has only herself to blame if her crime has been barren of the better part of its desired results. /18

The chief difficulty in the way of this theory, Freud points out, is the brief time apparently allotted to the entire action of the play by Shakespeare. Only a week seems to elapse. "There is no time for a long-drawn disappointment of their hopes of offspring to enervate the woman and drive the man to an insane defiance." /19 The psychological-physical requirements and Shakespeare's dramatic modification of the action remain irreconcilable.

Freud then begins a second attempt to approach the problem, but only indicates the direction in which such an investigation might proceed without himself carrying it out. He cites the opinion of Ludwig Jekels that Shakespeare

frequently splits up a character into two personages, each of whom then appears not altogether comprehensible until once more conjoined with the other. It might be thus with Macbeth and the Lady; and then it would of course be futile to regard her as an independent personage and seek to discover her motivation without considering the Macbeth who completes her. /20

Freud notes that there is some supporting evidence for this in the play and remarks tentatively that "perhaps they are the divided images of a single prototype," but he leaves the matter there.

Freud's chief concern in these studies is to show not merely that the Oedipus complex manifests itself even in literature but that it appears in varying forms each of which has its own specific significance, depending upon the intentions and capacities of the artist. The changes which are made by the authors for dramatic purposes are handled by Freud like the elaborations of a patient's dreams, and psychoanalytic techniques are used to unravel them, as far as this can be done. By such procedure the relation of the author to the thought of his time, to current literary conventions and to the requirements of his medium are shown to be as intimate as that of the variations and conformities of his own life to the typical basic patterns of psychic life.

The final vicissitude of life, the approach to death, was the third great problem whose literary treatment drew Freud's interest. "The Theme of the Three Caskets" is a study of the way in which man's attitude toward death is manifested through his relations with women in literature and mythology, as seen through psychoanalytic eyes. /21 The starting point is the choice between the caskets of gold, silver and lead made by Portia's suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio's speech rejecting the gold and silver and choosing the leaden casket has a perfunctory and unconvincing air as though he were trying, neither very hard nor very successfully, to justify a choice which he had determined beforehand to make but for which he could not state the real reasons. "If in psychoanalytic practice we were confronted with such a speech, we should suspect concealed motives behind the unsatisfying argument." /22 And the forced explanation is not the true one. Freud traces the myth back to its psychic sources and interprets it approximately as follows. A man is required to choose between three women, the third being the youngest and fairest, who is also endowed with the characteristic of silence; usually voluntarily and for compelling reasons she refuses to speak. Psychoanalytically this signifies death, and the third sister is therefore its Goddess, but if this is so, then "we know the sisters. They are the Fates, the Moerae, the Parcae or the Norns, the third of whom is called Atropos, the inexorable." /23

Does man, then, freely choose death? Here, too, psychoanalysis advances our understanding of the myth. The well-known tendency of the mental apparatus consciously or unconsciously to represent contraries "by one and the same element" has been at work.

17/ Sigmund Freud, "Some Character-Types Met With In Psychoanalytic Work," trans. E. Colburn Mayne, *Collected Papers*, Op. Cit., p. 330.

18/ *Ibid.*

19/ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

20/ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

21/ Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," trans. C. J. M. Hubback, *Collected Papers*, Op. Cit., pp. 244-256.

22/ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

23/ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

The Moerae were created as a result of a recognition which warns man that he too is a part of nature and therefore subject to the immutable law of death. Against this subjection something in man was bound to struggle, for it is only with extreme unwillingness that he gives up his claim to an exceptional position...So his imagination rebelled against the recognition of the truth embodied in the myth of the Moera, and constructed instead the myth derived from it, in which the Goddess of Death was replaced by the Goddess of Love and by that which most resembles her in human shape. The third of the sisters is no longer Death, she is the fairest, best, most desirable and the most lovable among women. /24

We must all die, but the myth offers the comforting wish-reassurance that we are free to choose. And, naturally, we choose not the horror of death but love and life.

Freud believes that in Shakespeare's mind

a reduction to the original idea of the myth is going on, so that we once more perceive the original meaning containing all the power to move us that had been weakened by the distortion of the myth. It is by means of this undoing of the distortion and partial return to the original that the poet achieves his profound effect upon us. /25

In *Lear* the powerful impact of the play is obviously due to more than the force of the "two prudent maxims" that one should retain one's possessions and privileges as long as one lives and that one should not succumb to flattery. To Freud it seems

quite impossible to explain the effect of the play from the impression that such a train of thought would produce, or to assume that the poet's own creative instincts would not carry him further than the impulse to illustrate these maxims. Moreover, even though we are told that the poet's intention was to present the tragedy of ingratitude, the sting of which he probably felt in his own heart, and that the effect of the play depends on the purely formal element, its artistic trappings, it seems to me that this information cannot compete with the comprehension that dawns upon us after our study of the theme of a choice between the three sisters. /25

While not denying the value of the spectator's reaction to the "purely formal element," Freud assigns the primacy to feelings of another order, to the unconscious echoes aroused in the audience by recreation of a human situation on the stage. It is conceivable that either could serve alone, but together they enhance and augment the dramatist's achievement.

The scene in which *Lear* enters with Cordelia dead in his arms thus represents symbolically the reverse of the apparent action. It is the Death Goddess bearing away the dead hero. "Eternal wisdom, in the garb of the primitive myth, bids the old man renounce love, choose death and make friends with the necessity of dying." The poet has shown us a man who is old and must soon die, a figure closer than Bassanio was to the original conception of the myth and so of greater force, since he carries with him more of the emotive connotations which we all dimly perceive below the surface. Both *Hamlet* and *Oedipus Rex*, as well as other great works, derive their power partly from the skill of the playwright and partly from the circumstance--not an accidental one--that the essential pattern of the action on the stage conforms to the Oedipal experiences which we have all undergone, each of us in his fashion. The dramatist's intuitive recognition of this helps to motivate his choice of subject which he then creatively adapts to meet both formal dramatic requirements and the expectations of the audience. But no matter what changes may have been wrought in the familiar fantasy by theatrical necessities, we can discern behind the alterations and elaborations the ancient emotional constellations which even in less cunning hands evokes our deepest response. The innate awareness of this by writers constitutes an integral part of their artistic equipment.

III

As it had done with other mysterious and neglected human phenomena such as dreams, errors and delusions, psychoanalysis began to look at art without magical or aesthetic preconceptions and to consider it as a mental product subject to the same laws of psychic functioning that governed other, more familiar activities. Although art is extremely complex and lies in large part outside the compass of science, the available information about certain areas of mental life which can be described psychoanalytically is applicable to it. Creative activity has its roots in the earliest experiences of the individual, traces of which are to be found in even the most polished work of art. The passage of the child through the oral, anal and genital phases of development culminating in the Oedipal stage at about the fifth or sixth year is a process of continuous curtailment of instinctual satisfactions and of progressive control over them. In psychoanalytic terms it is the gradual but steady replacement of id by ego; in ordinary language it is growing up or education. It must not

24/ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

25/ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

be supposed, however, that infantile impulses disappear; they merely seek channels for expression other than those which the ego closes to them. Since the world of real objects does not permit full gratification of the child's impulses, their energy must find some outlet through imagination. Among the chief means by which this necessary and normal adjustment is carried out are play and fantasy-making.

These activities are in the nature of compromises on the principle that half a loaf is better than none. The original impulses (notably the sexual ones, but not only these), are forbidden direct expression, but they can be appeased, for a time at least, in disguised form. For instance, the child's wish to incorporate orally the objects about him may take the harmless form of a dream in which he eats all the candy he wants. Or the wish to replace the father may emerge as the common daydream in which the little boy performs heroic deeds and wins the adulation of the populace. For the moment, the tension is alleviated, and the dreamer can go on to other things until it mounts again, whereupon he repeats the same process or a variant of it.

Play is the active performance of the fantasy, the acting-out of wishes. The spontaneous games of childhood serve the purposes of adjusting to the demands of the adults and mastering the fears and other psychic problems of that period. The same is true, at one remove, of those games which have become ritualized and which are repeated almost unchanged all over the child world. As a matter of fact, any physical activity may, in addition to its other functions, serve the same process. This is one of the important findings of psychoanalysis; the therapeutic method of Breuer and Freud depended on the fact that it "abrogated the efficacy of the original non-abreacted ideas by affording an outlet to their strangled affects through speech."

In adolescence the child may exhibit either rebellion against adult values or conformity to them in varying degree. This constitutes the normal ambivalence of that difficult period. The bodily changes of the age bring with them a psychic turmoil in which the rapidly developing sexuality presents a formidable problem. Fantasy-life is especially active; this is the time when poets are made--and unmade. Fantasy is a refuge from painful reality. The world is remade nearer to the heart's desire, a pleasant occupation which nobody ever willingly relinquishes. The personal daydream in its pure form "abandons its dependence upon real objects" and remains subject only to the pleasure principle. It is the admixture of portions of reality with such uninhibited reveries which provides much of the basis for poetic visions.

The normal adult, having passed through the typical experiences of growth, has learned at each stage to make the required adjustments. But every struggle, though successfully concluded, has left some residue in the personality, and his handling of the daily crises of life after reaching maturity echoes his past. The common heritage of all men is this store of memories, psychic and somatic, which responds to dozens of great and trivial stimuli between morning and evening of any day. This is the instrument on which the artist plays, both in himself and others:

Some actual experience which made a strong impression on the writer had stirred up a memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to childhood, which then arouses a wish that finds fulfillment in the work in question, and in which elements of the recent event and the old memory should be discernible. /26

Freud also made clear the relationship between ideas and emotions, pointing out that it is not the memory alone or the idea itself which has power to move.

We remain on the surface so long as we treat only of memories and ideas. The only valuable things in psychic life are, rather, the emotions. All psychic powers are significant only through their fitness to awaken emotion. Ideas are repressed only because they are connected with liberations of emotions which are not to come to light; it would be more correct to say that repression deals with the emotions, but these are comprehensible to us only in connection with ideas. /27

The psychic life, then, is the life of the emotions. From the point of view of psychoanalysis they are what is important; sensations and ideas of all kinds are merely their servants. It is concerned with the latter chiefly for their effects upon the psyche. Psychoanalysis is not indifferent to the truth or falsity of ideas--on the contrary, this is obviously of extreme importance in establishing the nature of external reality as well as in contributing to the understanding of the psyche itself--but its chief interest is in what the idea, whether true or false, will lead its holder to do. His conduct must then be evaluated in the light of the conformity of his frame of reference to the objective world or in its deviation from it.

In studying the writer, then, psychoanalysis sees him as a person who deals with the universal problems of emotional life in a very special way. Its contribution is in defining, describing, and, if possible, explaining this way. The writer is, naturally, subject to the

26/ Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," trans. I.F. Grant Duff, *Collected Papers, Op. Cit.*, p. 181.

27/ "Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*," *Op. Cit.*, p. 179.

same motivating forces as everyone else; he differs in his unexplained ability to embody his fantasies in forms which are attractive to others. He is a story-teller, and his stories are about the psychic experiences of his readers as well as his own. The basic function of the psychic component in any activity is to facilitate the biological and social career of the organism. The writer has chosen the life-task which affords him, taking everything into account, the greatest degree of inner satisfaction. In psychoanalytic terms, it assists him in maintaining internal balance by controlling levels of psychic tension and preventing them from shifting too rapidly or too far.

Freud recognized this psychological function of artistic activity very early. He saw in "Delusion and Dream" that "Our author...directs his attention to the unconscious in his own psyche, listens to its possibilities of development and grants them artistic expression, instead of suppressing them with conscious critique. Thus he learns from himself what we learn from others." /28 The working of the creative imagination is ultimately an outgrowth, far removed, of the child's play. "Perhaps we may say that every child at play behaves like an imaginative writer in that he creates a world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better." /29 There is a difference, however. The child, no matter how much he may become absorbed in the world of his play, distinguishes it clearly from reality. He borrows real situations and incorporates them in his temporary and voluntary self-delusion without changing them very much. Anyone who has observed children at play has noticed how easily they move from what is objectively real to what they imagine, that is, what is subjectively real. "Let's pretend" is a declaration that the distinction is clearly understood.

Now the writer does the same as the child at play; he creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously; that is, he invests it with a great deal of affect, while separating it sharply from reality....The unreality of this poetical world of imagination, however, has very important consequences for literary technique; for many things which if they happened in real life could produce no pleasure can nevertheless give enjoyment in a play--many emotions which are essentially painful may become a source of enjoyment to the spectators and hearers of a poet's work. /30

The satisfying of instinctual wishes which is afforded the child through play is granted the writer by his work. By the same token it also serves to alleviate psychic discomfort by "transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that they cannot be frustrated by the outer world." /31 The artist is a sensitive and introverted person who "has not far to go to become neurotic." /32 He does not necessarily become a neurotic, however, but continually wavers on the threshold of neurosis, sometimes crossing it for a time and then being brought back to normality by the healing effect of his creations.

The artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in fantasy life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of fantasy back to reality; with his special gifts he moulds his fantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. /33

The therapeutic effect resides in the acceptance of the fantasies by others and the granting of honor, respect and admiration to their creator. In this roundabout fashion he achieves not the original psychic aims, to be sure, but another kind of satisfaction which is similar in that the wishes which were forbidden in their original form are permitted in art and that the person who expresses them in artistic form is not denounced but praised. This worldly success serves at least temporarily to return the artist to normality until the tensions build up again--for his basic problems have not thereby been solved--and the whole thing must be gone through once more.

It is not surprising that a large number of the plots in world literature are variants of the Oedipal story. Writers, too, experience the struggles of emotional adjustment to their parents and are left with impressions comparable to those of others. The significance of this fact for our subject lies in the thesis of Freud that "the beginnings of religion, ethics, society, and art meet in the Oedipus complex." /34 Its influence has ramified throughout many important areas of human activity and has profoundly affected man's view of the world he lives in. Among its products is the "racial treasure-house of myths, legends, and fairy-tales." These, according to Freud's view, are reactions to basic human experiences which have, over long stretches of time, been given their distinctive forms. This casts light upon the perennial fascination of artists with mythological themes and the apparent necessity for each generation to produce its own version of the age-old story, even if only in the form of a translation of an older work.

The particular has interest for us as well as the universal. In art we find recorded

28/ Ibid., p. 240.

29/ "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

30/ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

31/ Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," trans. Joan Riviere, *Civilization, War and Death*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 31.

32/ A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 327.

33/ Sigmund Freud, "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," trans. M.N. Searl, *Collected Papers, Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

34/ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A. A. Brill, *Basic Writings, Op. Cit.*, p. 927.

not only the psychological heritage of the race but also the author's unique daydreams, and these have a local habitation and a name.

They march with the times; and they receive as it were "date stamps" upon them which show the influence of new situations. They form the raw material of poetic production, for the writer by transforming, disguising, or curtailing them creates out of his daydreams the situations which he embodies in his stories, novels, and dramas. The hero of a daydream is, however, always the subject himself, either directly imagined in the part of transparently identified with someone else. /35

The writer, insofar as he is a daydreamer, is likewise his own hero.

We must now examine the means by which the artist achieves his goal. The fusion of daydream and myth, of personal fantasy and universal illusion presents a problem and at the same time offers a partial solution. The problem is that each individual is interested primarily in his own daydreams and does not care particularly about those of anyone else. Since daydreaming is narcissistic ego gratification, the symbolic self-aggrandizement of another person is at best irrelevant, while at worst it may actually prevent the enjoyment of one's own. Leaving aside mutual daydreams or those communicated by a child to its parents, we seldom take any interest in the self-centered reveries of another person. But when the daydream is presented with the skill of which an artist is capable, we do. The pleasure we feel in it probably arises from many sources, but mainly it lies in the success with which the artist makes use of his means of bridging the gap between personal fantasy and the stories which he shares with everyone, that is, the artistic medium. The partial solution is in the experiences which all of us have had, since art is, among other things, communication. As Freud put it, "the essential Ars Poetica lies in the technique by which our feelings of repulsion [that is, unwillingness to enter into another person's daydream] is overcome." /36 There are, of course, barriers as well as bridges between individuals.

As to how the barriers may be bridged, Freud offers this much of an explanation:

We can guess at two methods used in this technique. The writer softens the egotistical character of the daydream by changes and disguises, and he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his fantasies. The increment of pleasure which is offered to us in order to release yet greater pleasure arising from deeper sources in the mind is called an 'incitement premium' or technically, 'forepleasure.' I am of the opinion that all the aesthetic pleasure we gain from the works of imaginative writers is of the same type as this 'fore-pleasure,' and that the true enjoyment of literature proceeds from the release of tensions in our minds. Perhaps much that brings about this result consists in the writer's putting us into a position in which we can enjoy our own daydreams without reproach or shame. /37

Of the endowment of the writer which enables him to perform this feat, Freud tells us only that

writers, indeed, have certain qualities which fit them for such a task; more especially, a sensitiveness of perception in regard to the hidden feelings of others, and the courage to give voice to their own unconscious minds....[They] are bound to certain conditions; they have to evoke intellectual and aesthetic pleasure as well as certain effects on the emotions. For this reason they cannot reproduce reality unchanged; they have to isolate portions of it, detach them from their connection with disturbing elements, what is called 'poetic license.' /38

The writer treats a significant theme according to his personal psychic adjustment to the problem which it represents. His choice of setting serves the same end. He decides the relative degrees of reality and fantasy which are needed, and he attempts to make the synthesis in his work. The realm of fiction is less subject to reality-testing and therefore more directly under the domination of the emotions. The writer, by arbitrarily and artificially establishing the conditions under which his tale will take place, makes us more susceptible to the feelings which he intends to arouse in us. We voluntarily assume an attitude of receptivity in which we stand prepared to let the author's words, characters, philosophy, even literary devices and conventions, evoke us in the appropriate emotional responses. Because of the fundamental sameness in our makeups we are often able to respond in exactly the same way, of course, since no two have had precisely the same combination of experiences.

The achieving of emotional effects in art is not, however, a simple matter of representing by means of the artistic medium some variants of the emotional experiences which all humans undergo. The medium itself imposes certain limitations and at the same time presents the artist with certain powers which help him to approach the limits of its potentiality for expressing and communicating mental states. Artistic work is a mysterious combination of intuitive choice and treatment of materials, and craftsmanship which is largely deliberate and conscious. In the case of literature, the medium of the art is also the medium of everyday communication. Psychoanalysis has thereby learned a great deal about its use from analytic patients.

35/ A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 89.

36/ "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," Op. Cit., p. 182.

37/ Ibid., pp. 182-183.

38/ Sigmund Freud, "Contributions to the Psychology of Love. A Special Type of Object-Choice Made by Men," trans. Joan Riviere, Collected Papers, Op. Cit., p. 192.

Multiplicity of meaning, a matter of great importance particularly in poetry is a proper subject of psychoanalytic study in connection with the communication and concealment of emotional states as related to ideas. The symbol-system of dreams conforms to laws which can be more or less directly applied to certain aspects of language symbols. Words, of course, frequently appear in dreams, where they behave much like the more numerous visual representations. The variety of meanings which may be legitimately assigned to a poem spring from the variety of impulses, feelings and ideas which have clustered around the poem's theme in the mind of the poet; before they can reach us they are, as it were, refracted through his poem.

Just as all neurotic symptoms, like dreams themselves, are capable of hyper-interpretation, and even require such hyper-interpretation before they become perfectly intelligible, so every genuine poetical creation must have proceeded from more than one motive, more than one impulse in the mind of the poet, and must admit of more than one interpretation. /39

The dream seeks "to reduce the separate dream-thoughts to the tersest and most unified expression of the dream...by fitting paraphrases of the various thoughts." /40 This is accomplished by the processes of condensation and displacement, with due regard for representability by visual symbols. Freud likened this to what happens in the composition of poetry:

The thought whose mode of expression has perhaps been determined by other factors will therewith exert a distributive and selective influence on the expressions available for the others, and it may even do this from the very start, just as it would in the creative activity of a poet. When a poem is to be written in rhymed couplets, the second rhyming line is bound by two conditions: it must express the meaning allotted to it, and its expression must permit of a rhyme with the first line. The best poems are, of course, those in which one does not detect the effort to find a rhyme, and in which both thoughts have as a matter of course, by mutual induction, selected the verbal expression which, with a little subsequent adjustment, will permit of the rhyme. /41

In Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious Freud examined the problem of the verbal medium in and through which witty ideas are expressed. As might be expected, there is a close correspondence between the mental processes which produce the visual symbols of dreams and those which operate in wit and in the artistic use of language. The same mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and representation are present but applied here to words rather than visual images. Freud condenses the process into this formula: "A foreconscious thought is left for a moment to unconscious elaboration and the results are forthwith grasped by the conscious perception." /42 This shows a close similarity to the dream-work, and he has accordingly given it the name "wit-work." The purpose and result of wit-work is pleasure, the pleasure of achieving a socially acceptable expression of what must otherwise be kept bottled up.

In the psychic economy this is brought about by a decrease in tension, usually a rather abrupt one. The obscene or aggressive impulse cannot be directly acknowledged, but it may be expressed in disguised form. The hearer recognizes in the witty expression an allusion to the same kind of impulse which exists in himself and which he is also forbidden to express openly. The realization that the forbidden material is out in the open causes in him likewise a release of some of the repressed affect, usually in the form of a quick laugh. All this, of course, takes place unconsciously; the overt actions seem automatic, almost like reflexes. And they are attributed by the laughter to the unexpectedness of the wit or to some other plausible quality in it--provided that he thinks about it at all. Freud's view is that there is an aesthetic pleasure, to be sure, in the formal aspects of wit but that the listener is most strongly affected by the elements which remain below the surface. It is the hidden meaning of wit and not its overt form which provides the major part of the motive power for the laugh. This hidden meaning is most likely to be sexual or aggressive; it affords a brief lessening of the pressures built up by the holding back of sexual or aggressive impulses in the laughter. Psychically, the pleasure in wit originates from "an economy of expenditure in inhibition," that is, from the simultaneous conscious appreciation of form and of the gratification of the unconscious need for expression of that which is forbidden.

This kind of economy is a commonplace in art. Every work of art has multiple meanings. Carried beyond mere language, for instance,

It is...a subtle economy of art in the poet not to permit his hero to give complete expression to all his secret springs of action. By this means he obliges us to supplement, he engages our intellectual activity, diverts it from critical reflections, and keeps us closely identified with his hero. A bungler in his place would deliberately express all that he wishes to reveal to us, and would then find himself confronted by our cool, untrammelled intelligence, which would preclude any great degree of illusion. /43

In Shakespeare's Richard III the unconscious feelings represented by the hero's actions satisfy us as long as we are not permitted by the playwright's technique to bring our critical reflection to bear upon them. If the illusion were once destroyed, our inhibitory mechanisms would be permitted to function again, and we might draw back in revulsion from the actions instead of vicariously

39/ The Interpretation of Dreams, Op. Cit., p. 164

40/ Ibid., p. 229.

41/ Ibid., pp. 229-230.

42/ Sigmund Freud, Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious, trans. A. A. Brill, Basic Writings, Op. Cit., p. 750.

43/ "Some Character-Types Met With in Psychoanalytic Work," Op. Cit., p. 323.

taking part in them. This is further borne out by the well known fact that

a witticism heard for the second time will almost fail of effect; a theatrical performance will never make the same impression the second time that it did on the first occasion; indeed it is hard to persuade the adult to read again at all soon a book he has enjoyed. Novelty is always the necessary condition of enjoyment. /44

The pleasure in art, as in wit, is the result of a combination of technique and tendency.

IV

Freud saw art, then, as a normal psychic activity carried on by individuals with special aptitudes. From the psychic standpoint artists use their aptitudes in the same way that others use whatever special abilities they possess; the psychic function of art is basically the same as the psychic function of any other occupation. "The forces motivating the artist are the same conflicts which drive other individuals into neurosis and which have impelled society to establish its institutions." /45 Freud means here the art which has successfully fulfilled its psychic function for its creator. This may be defined as the assuaging the pain of an unconscious conflict by providing a temporary--sometimes only a momentary--substitute gratification through the agency of a creatively elaborated fantasy with its accompanying aesthetic pleasures. The instinctual aims are thus diverted, with the help of sublimation, into channels where the outer world cannot frustrate them.

The satisfaction gained thereby, however, cannot last. Its intensity is far less than that which can be obtained by "gratifying gross primitive instincts," for these inevitably renew their demands when the relatively brief effects of art-pleasure have worn off. Art can achieve its psychic results because of the survival in adults of the childhood pleasure in fantasy-making, which is closely related to play. The diversion of psychic energy from real objects to objects in the fantasy cannot be permanent: "Art affects us but as a mild narcotic and can provide no more than a temporary refuge for us from the hardships of life; its influence is not strong enough to make us forget real misery." /46 It has been suggested by Freud that the artist is probably more sensitive to psychic stimuli than most people. If he is so endowed constitutionally, this would help explain the accuracy of his insights into human nature. It also bears upon the well-known sexual activities of certain writers and other artists which give the impression of being more frequent and more intense than those of most ordinary people. Generalizations are risky here, but as Freud points out,

The relation between possible sublimation and indispensable sexual activity naturally varies very much in different persons, and indeed with the various kinds of occupation. An abstinent artist is scarcely conceivable; an abstinent young intellectual is by no means a rarity. The young intellectual can by abstinence enhance his powers of concentration, whereas the production of the artist is probably powerfully stimulated by his sexual experience. /47

This sensitivity is combined with a tendency to look within himself. The artist, as we have seen has "an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become neurotic." /48 Neurosis is not a condition of artistic creativity, be it noted; if an artist is neurotic it may be for reasons not necessarily connected with his art. In Freud's view the artistic gift is as likely to be used for the purpose of fending off neurosis as for serving it. In fact, both uses may occur simultaneously, the preventive function usually being the dominant one. For the artist, with his extraordinary psychic sensitivity, the regulatory devices which society furnishes--education, convention, certain socially approved activities like business, politics and war--are not enough. He achieves his best results in the transformation of his instinctual impulses through artistic activity. If this fails, as it sometimes does, he crosses the border into neurosis. This aspect of the artist's psychic life, then, assumes the form of a series of advances and retreats. As the instinctual pressure rises and a neurotic "solution" appears imminent, the unconscious defense against it manifest itself through a work of art whose psychic effect is to discharge some of the affect and reduce it to a tolerable level. The emotional life moves in the direction of normality and remains there until the limits of toleration are once more approached and another reduction in pressure becomes necessary.

The mechanism of poetry is the same as that of hysterical fantasies. Goethe combined in Werther something experienced, his love for Lotte Kastner, and something heard, the fate of young Jerusalem, who ended in suicide. He entertained seriously the plan of killing himself, found therein a point of contact and identified himself with Jerusalem, whose motive he borrowed from the love story. By means of this fantasy he defended himself against the effect of his experience. /49

44/ Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure-Principle, trans. C.J.M. Hubback, (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 43.

45/ Sigmund Freud, "Das Interesse in der Psychoanalyse," Gesammelte Werke, VIII, p. 416. My translation.

46/ "Civilization and its Discontents," Op. Cit., p. 34.

47/ Sigmund Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness," Collected Papers, Op. Cit., II, p. 92.

48/ A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 327.

49/ Aus Den Anfängen Der Psychoanalyse, Op. Cit., p. 222. My translation.

The artist seeks primarily his own inner tranquility. In this he is not different from the scientist absorbed in his laboratory, the lawyer engrossed in the intricacies of his brief or indeed anyone who is immersed in his favorite pursuit.

Psychoanalysis as Freud conceived it stresses the value of the social function of art, its communication of mind with mind and psyche with psyche. This involves the transmission of the artist's ideas and psychic states by the use of symbols capable of carrying both conscious and unconscious stimuli which together evoke in the appreciator a combined intellectual and emotional response. Their power is enhanced by their patterns (artistic form), especially when these approximate the patterns of the basic human experiences which both artist and audience have as their common heritage. It must be remembered that this experience includes the response to similar material in mythological or other form, and so there has been established an almost universally favorable predisposition toward artistic representation of the same themes.

By his technique the artist presents the reader with a daydream which might have been his own, but which has become more than that. In its new form it is no longer a simple wish-fulfillment, and it is no longer private. The unadorned report of another's erotic or aggressive fantasy is merely a bit of case-history and as such has no aesthetic value. But the artist

is not the only one who has a life of fantasy; the intermediate world of fantasy is sanctioned by general human consent, and every hungry soul looks to it for comfort and consolation. But to those who are not artists the gratification that can be drawn from the springs of fantasy is very limited; their inexorable repressions prevent the enjoyment of all but the meager daydreams which can become conscious. A true artist has more at his disposal. First of all he understands how to elaborate his daydreams so that they lose that personal note which grates upon strange ears and become enjoyable to others; he knows too how to modify them sufficiently so that their origin in prohibited sources is not easily detected. Further, he possesses the mysterious ability to mould his particular material until it expresses the ideas of his fantasy faithfully; and then he knows how to attach to this reflection of his fantasy life so strong a stream of pleasure that, for a time at least, the repressions are outbalanced and dispelled by it. /50

This is how an event which might produce the opposite of pleasure if it were to occur in real life may give enjoyment when it is represented in artistic form. Writer and reader make a tacit agreement temporarily to suspend objective criteria of judgment in order to share an aesthetic experience. For the writer this is primarily a matter of formulation and publication; for the reader reception and partial re-experiencing. The full meaning of the underlying wish-fantasies or their applicability to the reader are, for the time, hidden. The work represents them as fulfilled:

They become a work of art through alteration which softens objections to them, disguises their personal origin and, by observance of the principles of aesthetics, offers the onlookers or hearers attractive pleasure-premiums. /51

Freud's basic contribution to the understanding of art is the psychoanalytic insight that the pleasure which we consciously take in form, technique and style is our acknowledged reward for having fulfilled our part of the compact with the artist and that our unacknowledged gain is the emotional release and enrichment the work of art affords us, a result which would not be possible without the relaxation of inhibition by aesthetic means.

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50/ A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Op. Cit., p. 328.

51/ "Das Interesse in der Psychoanalyse," Op. Cit., p. 416. My translation.

TRAGEDY, COMEDY AND THE ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE*

It is essential to recognize that in the full tragic experience there is no suppression. The mind does not shy away from anything, it does not protect itself with any illusion, it stands uncomfited, unintimidated, alone and self-reliant. The test of its success is whether it can face what is before it...without any of the innumerable subterfuges by which it ordinarily dodges the full development of experience. Suppressions and sublimations alike are devices by which we endeavor to avoid issues which might bewilder us. The essence of Tragedy is that it forces us to live for a moment without them.

I. A. Richards /1

We tend to use the word "esthetic" in two somewhat different senses. Most of the time we use it to describe the pleasure we characteristically obtain from art, a pleasure that we feel should be differentiated from the sometimes keener, sometimes more attenuated but nearly always palpably different gratifications we secure from our everyday activities. Occasionally, however, we may speak of having "an esthetic experience." When we do this, I believe we are usually trying to characterize an experience of exceptional poignance and intensity, an experience so rare and ineffable that we feel a desire to distinguish it not only from most of the satisfactions life affords us but even from much of the satisfaction we obtain from art.

Once in a great while, as I shall try to show, our everyday experience may precipitate the consummate satisfaction we call esthetic in this second, highly honorific sense. But far more frequently the satisfaction is a product of our immersion in artistic objects, and, usually, objects of transcendental value; in the field of the literary arts, the satisfaction is most regularly associated with tragedy.

Every characteristic of tragedy, it must be assumed, has something to do with its power to give us the satisfaction. Nevertheless, it is worth while, I believe, to try to isolate the factors -- I do not think they are more than two -- which are of decisive importance. The task may at once deepen our understanding of tragedy and give us a clearer conception of what we mean by an esthetic experience.

2.

The first of the characteristics is singled out at the very beginning of Aristotle's celebrated definition of tragedy: it is seriousness. Tragedy pays man the simple but apparently difficult compliment of taking him seriously. It insists on regarding his life, his actions, his thoughts and his feelings as of supreme importance. "The Tragic Spirit proposes," writes Joseph Wood Krutch, "that man shall be judged as he judges himself. It defines him in Hamlet's terms -- 'a creature how infinite in faculties, in comprehension how like a God' -- hence a creature whose every act is important and whose downfall is terrible. It attributes to him the dignity of intention and of bearing appropriate to a being for whom the whole universe was constructed, and it puts upon his passion the valuation which he, in the midst of a passion, attributes to it -- treating love with the raptness of a man in love and death with the agony of a man about to die." /2 If so excellent a statement has any shortcoming, it is its failure to suggest the rarity of the attitude tragedy achieves and sustains. Even in moments of crisis, as Krutch himself emphasized in another work, /3 many people do not seem to attach any great importance to their acts or emotions or even to their lives. They creep from womb to grave without feeling, as tragedy compels us to feel, that human life is valuable and consequential beyond all reckoning in terms of gain or loss, or even happiness or pain, and without claiming for themselves the dignity which tragedy unhesitatingly confers upon its meanest creature.

If tragedy's attitude were not serious to the point of reverence, it could deal even with matters of life and death without making them appear consequential; the slick mystery stories and melodramas which pour from the presses by the hundreds demonstrate the truth of this. On the other hand, an attitude of high seriousness would seem inappropriate, forced and perhaps even absurd in an account of the ordinary doings of ordinary men. The substance of tragedy, no less than its attitude, reveals its seriousness. Its protagonists, and usually many of its principals, are people of heroic mould, and they become involved in large events. The action of tragedy, as Aristotle also observed, must possess "a certain magnitude." Tragic heroes are rent by desires the satisfaction of which requires the violation of the tabus on which human society rests. Parricide, incest, the murder of one's wife or one's sovereign, extreme cruelty of parent to child or child to parent -- such are the deeds around which tragedy revolves.

*/ This article will form a portion of the author's work, Fiction and the Unconscious, to be published in 1957 by Beacon Press of Boston.

1/ Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), p. 246.

2/ Experience and Art (New York: Smith and Haas, 1932), p. 59.

3/ The Modern Temper (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929).

It is from the contrast between the giant souls of its protagonists and the nature of the desires which thrust themselves into their minds that the poignance of tragedy derives. We are immediately made to feel the idealism and intelligence of Brutus, the still sharper mind and finer sensibility of Hamlet, the dignity and romanticism of Othello. What moves us to the core of our being is the discovery that such men as these are not immune from the same terrible desires against which we must struggle -- that Brutus is so consumed by secret envy and ambition that he is willing to consider assassination; that Hamlet is paralyzed by guilty sympathy for the man who has killed his father and whored his mother; that Othello is so ready to believe Desdemona wanton and so swift to think of murdering her. It is by juxtaposing such strength and such weaknesses that tragedy makes us feel the contradiction of our nature, in which god-like aspirations and bestial impulses dwell side by side.

In the way it poses issues also tragedy depends to a considerable extent on contrast: it offers its heroes no way of resolving or escaping their conflicts; it compels them to choose between extreme alternatives. Despite the gravity of the issues they are weighing, it does not even give them long to make up their minds. In most tragedies something happens very early which at once prods the protagonist to reach a decision and makes the decision which beckons more difficult. Caesar agrees to go to the Capitol thus playing in with the plan of the conspirators. But he has thrice turned down the crown. Brutus must persuade himself both that Caesar will finally accept it and that this will change his nature -- an outcome he knows to be conjectural. Duncan visits Inverness, but his visit is another mark of his favor and imposes an additional obligation upon Macbeth to protect him. Because Hamlet is concerned with a failure to act, it may appear to be an exception but in fact it is not one. During the performance of the play within the play (Act III, Scene 2) Hamlet secures decisive and public proof of Claudius' guilt, and thus has an ideal opportunity to carry out his mission. After he fails to grasp it, it is perfectly clear to the reader -- though not of course to Hamlet -- that he will never be able to bring himself to avenge his father, and in fact he never does so. When he finally kills Claudius, it is to avenge his mother and himself.

The character, what today we might call the personality structure, of the tragic protagonist also dooms him to extreme choices. One and all, the heroes of tragedy are violent, impetuous and inflexible; as A. C. Bradley has observed, they are incapable of making compromises: they do not seek, and would probably disdain, "sensible" ways of resolving their problems. The rare person bold enough to urge a man of this stamp to be moderate is himself likely to incur his swift anger, and perhaps be banished, as Kent was. There is something frightening about the ease and speed with which tragic heroes succumb to the most intemperate impulses -- about the suddenness with which Lear turns on his most dearly beloved daughter and Othello on his wife; about the ease with which the conspirators win Brutus to their party and Lady Macbeth overcomes her husband's scruples. One feels that the tragic hero does not really have to be persuaded, and in fact could probably not be dissuaded, from committing the act which has suggested itself; those who appear to persuade him can be regarded as usually repudiated but now ascendant aspects of himself. The protagonists of tragedy must have their desire, no matter what the consequences. In their wilfulness they remind one of children during that stage of their development when they feel they can have whatever they want and attack with the full strength of their furious little bodies anyone who attempts to thwart them.

Consciously, of course, we condemn the rashness of the tragic hero, but there is another side to the matter. There is a portion of our own being which is importunate and unreconciled to curbs.⁴ Furthermore, the ease with which the tragic hero succumbs to the impulses which assail him helps to establish their urgency; it gives them a kind of sanction. It cannot be stressed too strongly that on some deep level we want the hero to yield to the impulses he feels and that we revel in his transgressions. Terrible as those impulses seem to us when they are abstracted and named, probably only the superego adopts an unreservedly censorious attitude toward them during the act of reading. The ego does not approve or even accept them, but it may be conjectured that it recognizes how inextricably interwoven they are with the other qualities of the characters and in particular with the very virtues which cause us to admire them. They are in fact the price -- perhaps the inescapable price -- of those virtues, the other side of the characters' idealism and largeness of spirit.

⁴ An unsubdued infant dwells within us all. Nor is this the only instance in which the infantile is involved in response to tragedy. Though our reaction to the high seriousness of tragedy rests upon a subliminal realization that we are engaging in reality testing upon a conscious and mature recognition of the importance of the issues around which tragedies revolve, beyond any question the importance of those issues is sometimes exaggerated, wilfully and arbitrarily. Lear will serve as a case in point. This over-evaluation betrays the presence of unconscious factors. Cf. Ernest Jones, "To say that a later reaction to a situation is excessive is simply to say that contributions have been made to it by the unconscious, i.e. the still living infantile mind. Before humour and other aids to mental digestion make their appearance these aspects of the infant's mind are entirely tragic, and all the tragedies of poets are ultimately derived from them." Hamlet and Oedipus (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955).

Because they give this impression of existing in poised tension with one another, the strengths and weaknesses of the tragic hero confer dignity upon each other. Our concern for the hero is the greater because we perceive that he has defects which menace not only his position and continued happiness but usually his very life. The qualities which make the hero preeminent seem more precious and poignant, and perhaps even more lustrous, because they are juxtaposed to the weaknesses which imperil them; we fear, indeed we sense, that these riches will be squandered. In turn, the virtues and stature of the hero extenuate and confer a momentary splendor on the weaknesses we share with him. Tragedy undoes some of the work of repression: it compels us to accept as part of our nature some of the tendencies we have tried to shunt from our sight. 75

It is obvious that tragedy richly gratifies the instincts. It not only permits the vicarious fulfillment of some of our most urgent and stubborn -- and therefore most strongly resisted -- desires; it permits the satisfaction of those desires under conditions which momentarily re-establish their authority and invest them with a grandeur commensurate with their outrageousness. The satisfaction the events of tragedy offer the superego is equally obvious and equally prodigal. Tragedy is as relentless as the superego itself in punishing wrongdoing and in discovering appropriate punishments. Indeed, as in *Oedipus the King*, where the messengers whose stories, separately considered, would be indecisive by arriving at the same time furnish irrefutable proof of Oedipus' guilt, there is something deterministic about the way tragedy pursues and exacts retribution from its heroic but flawed protagonists. We are quick to feel that whatever transgression suggests itself will be committed, but there is something oppressive about the way the certainty of the tragic hero's downfall imposes itself upon our minds. At a certain point the world of tragedy begins almost visibly to shrink, to contract around the doomed hero like that chamber of horrors described by Poe in "The Pit and the Pendulum." The sense of fate tragedy so often inspires is due in large part to the inexorable course of its falling action.

Though it is less apparent, I believe that the events of tragedy are also richly satisfying to the ego. It benefits from having the claims of the instincts specified and brought into the open. It benefits from having them symbolically gratified and made more amenable to its control. Above all, it benefits from letting desire and inhibition, id and superego, engage in a mock but violent battle under the strict terms which tragedy proposes. One may suppose that the ego sometimes becomes weary to the point of bitterness from its incessant efforts to moderate and reconcile the claims of its unreasonable psychic partners. "Very well," one can imagine it suggesting in such a mood, "within the framework laid down by tragedy let us have the pitched battle for which you both seem to be aching. Let us acknowledge our darkest and most carefully concealed desires. Let us see what acts they impel us to commit. And let us commit the acts. Let us see what kind of creatures we really are and fulfil our destiny no matter what the cost. Only let us agree now, the cost, however high, must be paid." It is easy to think of the events of any tragedy as having been selected to conform to the terms of some such confessional and cathartic proposal.

3.

While immersed in the world of tragedy, we accept tragedy's high seriousness without question; we may temporarily forget that there are many other ways of looking at things. A single evening with tragedy's easygoing sister, comedy, will quickly remind us that the tragic attitude is in fact a quite special one -- and perhaps make us feel that it is unnaturally and undesirably rigid.

The contrast between the tragic and the comic approach to life could scarcely be more sharp. Tragedy raises -- more technically, it over-cathets -- everything it touches. It depicts characters of heroic mould, involves them in large events, compels them to choose between extreme alternatives. It invites us to face and work through the aspects of our own nature and the human predicament which are most likely to arouse anxiety. In contrast, comedy tries to spare us anxiety and to dissipate whatever anxiety we may already feel. It minimizes and belittles. It tells us that everyone and everything, ourselves included, is less important than we think. It focuses our attention upon characters who are either not large enough or not serious enough to commit the kind of offenses which shatter the lives of the protagonists of tragedy. To eat and drink well, have as much fun as possible and keep one's skin intact -- these are the only goals to which most comic characters are likely to be firmly committed. Unlike the heroes of tragedy, they are usually quite willing to compromise.

To be sure, comic characters have their faults; some of them seem to be composed largely of faults. Comic characters may be indolent, unreliable, vain, hypocritical, frivolous, acquisitive or lascivious -- and sometimes a single character has almost this entire roster of failings. But while such failings may arouse scorn, they do not excite fear. Particularly since they are usually buttressed by such qualities as cunning and resilience, they do not threaten to involve the characters in anything worse than the kind of scrapes from which, after a little squirming, we feel sure they will be able to extricate themselves. And the prospect of their having to suffer a certain amount of trouble is positively pleasing. Unlike other forms of fiction, comedy keeps us disassociated from its characters so that even when they are amiable we do not feel that we are debarred from having a certain amount of fun at their expense. We watch their antics in very much the same spirit in which we might observe the foolish behavior of small children, and while our mood would change instantly if they did something which put them in serious danger, so long as they do not we are unashamedly amused. When the characters are reprobates, comedy invites the kind of laughter which has some malice

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Cf. A. C. Bradley: "...tragedy portrays a self-division and self-waste of spirit, or a division of spirit involving conflict and waste. It is implied in this that on both sides in the conflict there is a spiritual value. The same idea may be expressed...by saying that the tragic conflict is one not merely of good with evil, but also, and more essentially, of good with good. Only, in saying this, we must be careful to observe that 'good' here means anything that has spiritual value, not moral goodness alone, and that 'evil' has a similarly wide sense...there is good on both sides...even where, as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the contest seems to lie, and for most purposes might conveniently be said to lie, between forces simply good and simply the reverse. This is not really so, and the tragic effect depends upon the fact. It depends on our feeling that the elements in the man's nature are so inextricably blended that the good in him, that which we admire, instead of simply opposing the evil, reinforces it. ..." *Hegel's Theory of Tragedy*, in *Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, edited by Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles and Gordon McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), pp. 62-63.

in it. Since we are not identified with the characters, nothing prevents us from laughing at them -- from feeling scorn or some other emotion in which there is an element, sometimes a large element, of hostility. The emphasis on their weaknesses puts us in a good psychological position to entertain such feelings, for it causes our own weaknesses to sit more lightly upon us.

However, the pleasure we take in the misadventures of comic characters is not fully explained by the nature of their weaknesses, even when allowance is made for our comforting sense of dis-association. Objectively considered, in fact, those weaknesses are often not as insignificant as comedy pretends; and because they are our own weaknesses, if treated in the wrong way they would arouse anxiety and guilt, so that we would feel obliged to take a disapproving attitude toward them as a way of asserting our innocence. Here, as in tragedy, attitude is of coordinate importance with substance. By one means or another comedy compels us to regard the weaknesses as of small consequence and to judge them more leniently than we ordinarily do. It sets the tone for the response of its audience. The attitude of most comedies is that of an urbane and tolerant friend, amused rather than censorious about that blond he saw us out with the night before. In a world where such an attitude prevails we sense that it would be unseemly and foolish to let ourselves become exercised by the spectacle of human frailty. Other comedies are caustic and the reverse of indulgent, but they suggest a scale of values against which the weaknesses and misdeeds of the characters seem trivial -- less important, in many cases, than the characters would like to think them. Human beings are errant knaves all, these more astringent comedies remind us, and, granted that the little people it sets before us are far from admirable, they, and by inference we ourselves, are no worse than anyone else.

Comedy also minimizes the seriousness of the situations in which its characters become involved. In most cases the characters cooperate: they do not take their affairs too seriously themselves. They quite cheerfully compromise, or even reverse their position, when that seems expedient. They do not permit themselves to get into extreme predicaments in which their very life may hang in the balance. When they stumble into trouble, and this they tend to do, they resort to any device which suggests itself, not excluding subterfuges which would be beneath the dignity of the tragic hero, in order to get out of it. Because they are flexible and resourceful, there always seem to be many possibilities open to them. For reasons we shall consider in a minute, even when comic characters are of a different stamp, and beset by innumerable troubles, they never give the impression of being trapped, isolated like a tragic hero whose doom is imminent in a small and contracting square of space. The world of comedy adjoins the one we know and is as spacious as that world appears when we are young.

When comedy deals with characters who take life seriously -- and some of its characters, especially if they are youthful, may be guilty of this heresy -- it is careful not to let the reader follow suit. Some comedies mercilessly expose the triviality and meretriciousness of the things to which the characters attach importance; they ask us to laugh at their scale of values as we laugh at everything else. Shakespeare and certain other writers feel too much affection for their characters to employ such an approach, but they also contrive to deprecate the importance of the matters which seem so momentous to the characters. They do this so caressingly that the very enthusiasm of the characters causes us to love them the more. Nevertheless, another attitude emerges, and prevails against theirs. Whereas tragedy may suggest that if necessary one should gladly risk life itself to win the woman one desires, and certain zealous comic characters espouse the same doctrine, comedy is likely to treat love as an engaging but irrational prejudice -- "the delusion", in the words of H. L. Mencken's aphorism, "that one woman differs from another." The characterization typical of the kind of comedies of which I am speaking supports this attitude. Neither its Lysanders and Demetriuses, nor its Hermias and Helenas, are sharply enough differentiated to permit a bystander to suppose that it is a matter of world-shaking significance who mates with whom.

Not that comedy is unaccommodating. It is willing and even desirous that every Jack shall have his Jill. But it wants to tease Jack a bit first for our pleasure. It knows that in the end he will prize his Jill the more, and we will enjoy their union the more, if it is not brought about straightaway. The danger of this course is that we may also have to share the anxiety the characters experience during the more discouraging phases of their affairs. To prevent this from happening, comedy nearly always finds some means of letting the reader know that everything will work out well in the end. It may make us privy at once to the explanation of difficulties which perplex the characters. Shakespeare employs this device, for example, in The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream.

In good time -- when we have been sufficiently stimulated and before the characters are too discouraged -- comedy begins to unravel the apparently hopeless snarl it has created. The task is never so difficult as it appears. Frequently the complications depend upon nothing more substantial than mistaken notions about what one or another of the characters has done or mixups of identity. The more hardened characters of comedy have manifest skill, and we would surmise experience, in extricating themselves from embarrassing predicaments; the more ingenuous ones at least have the virtue of persisting until matters can be straightened out. And comedy shows how good-natured it really is by the kind of help it now begins to furnish the artful and the innocent alike. Whereas tragedy appears to get more rigorous and deterministic as it proceeds comedy usually becomes increasingly slack and haphazard. It utilizes whatever means seem easiest for setting matters straight, not shunning accidents, coincidences or supernatural intervention, and not troubling its carefree soul too greatly about plausibility; Voltaire unhesitatingly resurrects characters when that suits his purpose. The concluding phases of some comedies remind one of the kind of scurried tidying-up which may take place when a family has only a minute or two to prepare for the arrival of unexpected guests.

It is evident that comedy seeks to spare us anxiety and reduce feelings of guilt. Even when it is frenzied, and all but shouts with laughter about the foibles of humanity, it whispers its real message: "You foolish reader, with your small vanities and small vices, which you struggle so desperately to conceal and deny -- Relax, you're not so bad!" Comedy is by no means immoral. Implicitly if not explicitly it extols certain of the fundamental virtues, above all humaneness and honesty. But it suggests that to err is human, and -- certain comedies such as Gulliver's Travels excepted -- it

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minimizes the importance of our lapses from grace. Whether critical or compassionate, it views the foibles of human beings in somewhat the same perspective in which adults observe the shortcomings of children. It invites us to take weaknesses which are a source of shame and apprehension more lightly than we ordinarily do. The reduction of guilt and anxiety which ensues when we accept its invitation always produces a feeling of exhilaration, and when it is sudden and considerable may precipitate that outward sign of pleasure, laughter.

It could be urged that there is something irresponsible and even dishonest about the attitude of comedy. Its bookkeeping is often lax. The weaknesses it exposes sometimes involve us in difficulties which leave permanent scars. But there is something else to be said; if there were not, we would be unable to explain our respect for comedy, our feeling that it makes some contribution without which life would be infinitely more onerous. The respect is not adequately explained, in my opinion, by the common notion that what comedy supplies is escape, that it transports us to a pleasurable artificial world which has no relevance for our everyday existence. We value comedy, I believe, because it supplies us with an attitude which is important, perhaps indispensable, for our survival in the world in which we live and err and suffer, the only world we shall ever know. Without occasional recourse to that attitude a creature like man, aspiring and god-like but also frail and fallible, might find it impossible to come to terms with himself. Inter urinas et faeces nascimur. If our standards are too high, how shall we find it possible to forgive ourselves for the compromises which we, no less than the characters of comedy, must continually make not only to succeed but to survive in a predatory and sinful world? The code of comedy is perhaps not literally defensible, but it is a necessary corrective to man's tendency to judge himself too pitilessly.

Apart from its utility, furthermore, there is something admirable about comedy. Even serious comedies do not confront the ugly and painful aspects of human life as unblinkingly as tragedy, but in their own way they not only deal with them, they attempt to wring pleasure out of them. It would be a serious mistake to equate comedy with the things it depicts. These, as we know, are often mean and paltry. What is wonderful about comedy is the way it treats even potentially depressing material, its equanimity and buoyance, the zest which manifests itself in pace and tone and style. Comedy's very resilience suggests that there is more to man than the rather soiled side of our nature it sometimes exposes. There is something tonic and redemptive about our ability to laugh at ourselves and perceive what a ridiculous figure we sometimes cut in a universe little impressed by our posturing or our accomplishments. An observation Freud made about humor applies without alteration to any masterpiece of comedy, such as Candida: "...what is fine about [humor] is the triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability. It refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists that it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, that these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure... Humor is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies the triumph not only of the ego, but also of the pleasure principle, which is strong enough to assert itself here in the face of the adverse real circumstances." /6

4.

Tragedy commemorates a still more resplendent triumph of the ego, a triumph which does not depend upon pretense, denial or illusion of any kind. In tragedy the ego -- the conscious ego of the protagonist -- acknowledges its vulnerability; it does not attempt to deprecate either the suffering it is already experiencing or that which lies ahead; it unshrinkingly accepts the prospect of its own annihilation. It also acknowledges its transgressions in all their seriousness and the justice of the punishment it is being called upon to bear. But it rejects the solace it could obtain by repenting those transgressions, by suing for peace with conscience or with secular or divine authority. The tragic hero appeals to no one. Simply by confronting his misfortunes and the mistakes or weaknesses responsible for them, by refusing to be intimidated, by facing the things from which at other times he might shy away, he gains the ascendancy over them.

The tragic Hero's triumphant confrontation of his gravest defects and the most terrible penalties man or the gods can inflict upon him has no parallel in any other genre of fiction; it is the most stirring experience narrative art has to offer. The response it evokes is of cardinal importance in explaining tragedy's capacity to give us that exalted satisfaction we sometimes describe as an esthetic experience. This is the more remarkable because in certain respects confrontation accomplishes nothing. Furthermore, confrontation is often diffuse rather than dramatic -- in Lear it spreads over almost the entire play. Even when it occurs at a precise point which can be fixed, as in Oedipus the King or Othello, it occupies too little space to warrant our calling it a structural stage of tragedy. Indeed, it is sometimes so fleeting, and so admixed with other things, that we may fail to single it out as a discrete phase of tragedy as we respond to it. It seldom leads to action and when it does, as when Oedipus gouges out his eyes or Othello stabs himself, it is not the acts but what lies behind them which moves us. The acts seem foreordained. In what he does the hero by now seems no more than an agent of destiny. In what he thinks and feels, on the other hand, it is evident that he has attained a larger measure of freedom than ever before, and his thoughts and feelings consequently possess momentous significance. These thoughts and feelings must receive embodiment in soaring language, but confrontation is essentially a psychic experience.

Indeed, it is because it is too late for the tragic hero to act in any way which would significantly alter the course of developments -- and perhaps because he no longer has any disposition to alter them -- that he now finds himself capable of the kind of contemplation in which he engages. His folly or transgression is behind him. His doom is inescapable and imminent, its very shape visible or becoming so. But his powers of mind and spirit are unimpaired, and the very extremity of his position prompts him to utilize them to secure an understanding of himself and his predicament.

The same energy with which he previously tried to impose his will upon the world now flows into this psychic effort. ²² Some of the energy formerly consumed in repression is also available for the effort, for the tragic hero no longer has any motive to conceal anything from himself, to tell himself lies or comfort himself with false hopes. The dark aspects of his own soul have secured release, and the overwhelming legions the world has deployed to punish him for his misdeeds or his mistakes are already visible against the horizon.

And so he faces himself. With a determination, honesty and objectivity which would have been impossible before, he strives to understand himself and his destiny. In Santayana's words, "He sums himself up...This I have been, says he, this I have done." ²⁸ He does not always achieve complete insight, earnestly as he tries to. Othello is vouchsafed no more than a glimpse of the abysses of his nature which made him so easy a prey to Iago. Hamlet never becomes aware of the forces which keep him from proceeding with that one act he flagellates himself to perform. On the other hand, Oedipus and Lear achieve a large measure of understanding, and we feel that every tragic hero without exception continues to grow and never understands himself or his fellows so well as he does just before he dies. Basically, however, it is not the success or failure of the hero's effort to understand himself that matters. What stirs us is his very willingness to try to understand and his readiness to confront the fate awaiting him without evasion or dishonesty.

The tragic hero's resoluteness perhaps replenishes, as well as reveals, his courage: it may help him to summon the strength he needs to experience his fate without flinching. Somewhere he finds the strength; he goes to his death with a dignity which is difficult to convey in words. He does not protest the sentence which has been imposed upon him or seek to escape it. On the other hand, he does not "accept" his fate either, or become reconciled to it, if by these words something passive or supine is implied. Nor does he simply endure his fate, as an animal might. In some almost physical sense he rises to his fate, with his eyes open and his sense clear, and proves himself impervious to it. By his very demeanor as he is being destroyed he demonstrates that he is not "a pipe for Fortune's finger to sound what stop she please."

As I have indicated, I believe that it is only in tragedy that one encounters the triumphant confrontation of the darkest impulses of the human heart and the most savage penalties society can devise to chasten these and punish us for our transgressions. In a great deal of fiction there is only a limited amount of self-exploration, or none at all. In Remembrance of Things Past, in many of James' novels and in Joyce's "The Dead" the characters face themselves and achieve deep insight, but what they contemplate is by no means so frightening as the things at which the heroes of tragedy unwaveringly gaze. It is perhaps significant that the heroes of Dostoevsky's three great novels, The Brothers Karamazov, The Idiot and Crime and Punishment are all broken by their offenses, even when, as in the first two novels, they have been committed by proxy; they go mad or, like Raskolnikov, fall into a state between hysteria and illness; they are never able to look back without fear upon what they have done. Kafka's Joseph K. is progressively possessed and overwhelmed by his guilt; he does not grapple with it and try to act against its dictates, he does not survey himself from the outside, as Hamlet does. Of the various heroes and heroines of fiction of whom I can think, only Anna Karenina faces the prospect of her own destruction, and the most shameful aspects of her own nature and of human nature in general, with the kind of remorseless honesty characteristic of the protagonists of tragedy. And Anna's confrontation is not triumphant. The wonderful poise we feel sure she still possessed in the early stages of her affair with Vronsky has long since deserted her; she rushes to her death, frenzied, disillusioned and embittered.

The kind of confrontation which occurs in tragedy is also rare in life itself. In one way or another -- by repression, by lies, by denial -- most people keep themselves from seeing the very things which at the end the tragic hero tries to see; this is the theme of Eugene O'Neill's little understood and little appreciated drama, The Iceman Cometh. In one way or another most people are also scarred and defeated by their weaknesses. For example, they may become brutal or cynical. They may find life tolerable only when they resort to drink or some other stupefaction, sacrificing the hope of ecstasy and innumerable mental and spiritual pleasures in order to win surcease from pain. When disaster strikes, even their customary props may prove ineffectual, and they may suffer some sort of mental or physical collapse which dooms them to function thereafter on a still lower level, going through the motions of life while awaiting death.

The tragic hero's steadfast confrontation of his predicament stirs us, I believe, because we sense it might save us from such defeats as these. Like the basic attitude of comedy, it supplies us with a stance important for our very survival. Because the tragic hero has become an instrument of destruction and must therefore be destroyed, the qualities he displays during his travail do not save him, but this may enhance rather than decrease their value: it gives them a wider and a deeper reference. When one faces a situation at all comparable to the tragic hero's, there is ordinarily very little that one can

2/ Cf. Santayana: "...impossibility of action is a great condition of the sublime...While we think we can change the drama of history, and of our own lives, we are not awed by destiny. But when the evil is irreparable, when our life is lived, a strong spirit has the sublime resource of standing at bay and of surveying almost from the other world the vicissitudes of this." The Sense of Beauty (New York: Scribner's, 1934), p. 178.

8/ Ibid., p. 180.

"do." And in general man is too puny to accomplish much through action, to make any significant alteration in that vast universe he inhabits such a brief and uncertain span of time; he has no control, or only a limited degree of control, over many of the things which befall him. He can, however, strive to understand and adjust to every vicissitude of experience, no matter how painful. When calamity strikes, he can summon resources he did not know until then he possessed -- and perhaps until then did not possess -- so that he can meet them without quailing. The confrontation phase of tragedy supplies an image of this kind of courage and dignity. It reminds us, even as the tragic hero perishes, of the indefeasible spirit of man.

Entirely on the basis of that high seriousness which is reflected in both its substance and its attitude, tragedy makes a deeper appeal than any other form of fiction to all of the psychic institutions. The confrontation phase of tragedy offers the ego additional satisfactions of the richest sort. It exalts the ego. It shows it continuing its labor of reality-testing and reporting even when death or mutilation looms ahead. It shows it continuing and accelerating its efforts to integrate the personality under the most difficult conditions a man can be called upon to face. These efforts are successful. Before death the ego comes to terms with its intemperate psychic partners, and it does this not by repudiating or compromising their claims but by accepting them, by granting the legitimacy of their most extreme demands yet at the same time maintaining its own authority.

On occasion something more miraculous than this occurs. As the tragic protagonist takes stock of himself, chastened but not contrite, assenting to punishment but uncowed by it, his ego, and the ego of the responding spectator, appear to assimilate id and superego. For an instant the personality becomes not only more coherent and continuous but fully unified. The ego incorporates the dark, unruly forces it has tried so unremittingly to control. Even as it contemplates the irreparable damage they have caused, it accepts them and assumes full responsibility for them. At the same time, and in the same spirit, it replaces the superego. It not only agrees to the need for punishment but accepts responsibility for executing punishment should society prove laggard. And it does not do this, as one often does when one submits to punishment, so that, purged of guilt, it can sue for reconciliation with the superego and the parents and communal forces whose heir and representative it is. It asks nothing of the superego, not even forgiveness and love. It assimilates the superego just as it does the id: it assumes the right to judge itself. Without disputing the parental decree that one's anarchistic impulses must be disciplined and controlled -- this is accepted along with certain apparently incompatible claims of the instincts themselves -- in the confrontation phase of tragedy the ego asserts its independence of the parents. It stands on its own, fully mature, neither approving nor yet refusing to acknowledge its own unregenerate tendencies, erect, clear-eyed and self-sufficient, the parent of itself.

5.

It is because tragedy so richly fulfils and harmonizes all the needs of our nature, from the most primitive to the most refined, from the basest to the most idealistic, that it so frequently gives us that supreme satisfaction we call an esthetic experience. For the esthetic experience can be nothing else but this -- a feeling that all our claims, however contradictory, have been brought into balance and satisfied, a feeling of equilibrium based upon fulfilment rather than the denial of those needs which cannot be fitted into the more impoverished pattern of living we have developed for ourself, a feeling of wanting nothing, of having everything for which we could possibly ask.

The extant to which most available descriptions of the esthetic experience support this view of it is remarkable -- particularly as the experience is so elusive that one might expect verbal accounts of it to vary widely. Like other intangible experiences, it probably takes a somewhat different form with every individual, and with any given individual on different occasions. Despite these difficulties certain words recur in most descriptions -- contentment, peace, harmony, serenity, synthesis, equipoise, equilibrium. Certain omissions are perhaps also significant. Together with what is said, in any case, they make it clear that during the experience we are not disturbed by desire and longing. There is a complete absence of tension, anxiety and guilt, those indicators of disharmony and disequilibrium within the psyche. For an ecstatic moment we feel entirely satisfied and at one with ourself, free of the inner strain which makes life burdensome. The future is devoid of threat: we feel possessed of a key which will permit the free interplay and mutual accommodation of all our tendencies. Conflict is annulled, the cleavage between the various parts of the psyche obliterated. We feel healed and whole.

Another characteristic of the experience, perhaps a consequence of the efficient adjustment which has been achieved, is that we feel exhilarated and refreshed. We have no disposition to act, we feel content and still, but we have a tingling sense of vitality and power. Having no practical aim, the energy available to us flows into seeing and understanding: it seems that our eyes have never been so fully open and that we have never penetrated so deeply into the nature of things. The seeing is joyous and an end in itself; it is not an incitement to action any more than it is a symptom of restlessness, it is the kind of seeing celebrated by Marvell in "The Garden." We see clearly and, as it were, with our whole being, without either the selective singling out of certain details or the selective blindness which is inevitable when our eyes are fogged by anxiety or desire, habit or practical considerations. It is because we see in this manner, with our interest unaffected by our ordinary concerns and desires, that we sometimes have a sense of detachment, of "disinterestedness," of almost impersonal perception. We see truly and without haste: we know that we do not have to falsify our response out of a sense of what is expected of us or refuse to notice certain aspects of what lies before us or leave various implications unexplored.

Whenever we look in this fashion -- whether at external reality or some "made object," an episode in a book or a story as a whole -- what we perceive has a charm and loveliness, or an august splendor, we may feel we have never witnessed before -- or have glimpsed briefly and then lost sight of, we had

138.

feared forever. We have a special word for the objects which permit this kind of seeing, which give us a sense of serenity and rich content: we call them beautiful. 79

6.

While tragedy is more likely than any other form of fiction to fulfil and reconcile the needs of the entire personality, every story which deserves the name, every story which meets the minimum requirements of a work of art, labors toward the same end. The tension between content and form suggests that fiction tries to satisfy divergent and even discordant needs; and close analysis of content and form shows that each of them appeals individually to the several parts of the psyche, though leaving it to the other to supplement and balance its own accomplishments.

Since fiction has this characteristic, we may be sure that whenever the reading experience is successful intrapsychic harmony is furthered to some extent. Sometimes -- perhaps when important claims we had regarded as irreconcilable are adjusted and satisfied -- we secure a satisfaction which seems qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from anything we ordinarily experience. It is this rare and deservedly prized satisfaction we call an esthetic experience. We are fully justified in regarding it as *sui generis* and giving it a special name, but we should not forget that it is continuous with a satisfaction we frequently experience. Nor should we forget that a novel or a short story -- or a motion picture or musical comedy -- may sometimes be the source of the more valuable satisfaction, and that tragedies do not always provide it.

The point requires stress because there is a persistent tendency to associate even humble forms of esthetic satisfaction exclusively with certain highly regarded artistic objects. It is sometimes even viewed as an attribute of those objects, and beauty is still more frequently looked upon as a property of things. Now in fact -- as has been repeatedly pointed out since the eighteenth century, though it sometimes seems to no avail -- there is a kind of shorthand involved when we speak of beauty in this way. Beauty really refers to the effect of an object upon a beholder. For the sake of convenience we may attribute the effect to the object which aroused it, but it is important that we remember that a beholder is also involved. Another beholder might pass by the object in question without noticing it; still another might find it ugly.

It is perhaps more obvious that when we speak of esthetic satisfaction we are referring to the effect of an object upon a beholder -- in the context of our inquiry, of a story upon a reader. The reader's needs, his readiness for the satisfactions embodied in a particular work, and his ability to perceive them, are crucially involved. The most perfunctory glance at any historical or sociological study of taste indicates that there may be great variations from period to period, country to country, and class to class, in the characteristics of the art works which are likely to be admired and a source of pleasure. The prestige of a given work, or of the whole body of work by a given author, may fluctuate widely through the centuries. This does not necessarily mean that all the elements affecting taste are in flux -- some may be persistent and relatively stable -- but some at least appear to shift, sometimes quite rapidly. The modal requirements of successive ages may vary sharply. One age may insist on strict adherence to classic norms, on mildness of content and smoothness of form, on the largest possible measure of control. The next age may contemptuously dismiss work with such characteristics as boring and flabby, landscape gardening for a generation or a social class afraid of nature and of life; it may demand "Sturm und Drang," irregular contours, violent imagery, and forms which give the emotions as much play as possible. Furthermore, even in periods when the audience for art was evidently much more homogeneous than it is today the work which achieved popularity varied widely in complexity and value. The point does not have to be laborious. If we are adult, our own taste has probably undergone enough mutations to teach us that the needs and capacities of the reader help to determine whether a given work will provide esthetic satisfaction or, for that matter, pleasure of any kind. The novel which thrilled us when we were eighteen may seem a piece of trumpery a decade later.

The tendency to disregard such facts as these and to claim that only certain works can provoke esthetic response is, however, understandable enough. Artistic works are bewildering in their number and diversity. It is natural that we should want to arrange them in some reassuring order of merit; natural, too, that we should put the works which most profoundly affect us at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. They may well belong there, but not even widespread concurrence about this will justify our appropriating the word beauty for them alone. All we are warranted in saying is that certain works seem more likely

9/ It will be apparent that the conception of the esthetic experience advanced here closely corresponds with what Ogden, Richards and Wood call "synaesthesia." (*The Foundations of Aesthetics*, New York: International, 1929.) I should also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Hanns Sachs, who so far as I know was the first person to formulate a theory of the esthetic experience and of beauty on the basis of psychoanalytic concepts. (See *The Creative Unconscious*, Cambridge, Mass., 1942, especially Part Three.) Despite the many fine insights Sachs achieved, I believe that he confused the issue by introducing the concept of "death instinct." I cannot assent to his view that a feeling of sadness is a necessary constituent of the esthetic experience. W. R. D. Fairbairn has also advanced a psychological theory of the esthetic experience which contains much of value. ("The Ultimate Basis of Aesthetic Experience," *British Journal of Psychology*, XXIX, 1938-39.) But in my judgment he puts far too much emphasis on destructive urges and the desire to make restitution for them. In brief he maintains that, "The demand of the libido may be said to constitute the thesis of art, the pressure of the destructive urges the antithesis, and restitution the synthesis." This seems too narrow a base for a theory of response in general or the esthetic experience in particular. To how many works can it be applied without some forcing?

than others to provide esthetic delight and to be proclaimed beautiful. We may be sure that they will not be beautiful to all and that works we disdain will seem beautiful to some. The most gimcracky amusement-park prize may possess that wondrous quality for some of those who compete for it; and a story a student of fiction might find stereotyped and meretricious may arouse a response it would be priggish not to call esthetic in a reader hungry for the particular satisfactions it offers and blind to its defects. In view of such considerations as these, the futility of trying to anticipate precisely what will be regarded as beautiful in the future, and to prescribe rules for art, should be apparent. Because what pleased us yesterday palls today and new needs supplant old, there is necessarily something unpredictable about beauty.

Though the fact seems to disturb some estheticians, it seems certain that not only artistic objects of widely varying quality but things that we experience in our everyday life sometimes arouse esthetic satisfaction; from time to time we catch a glimpse of beauty during our ordinary activity. The occasions are infrequent enough. While immersed in affairs, we are usually too preoccupied with the practical aspects of things to see beauty though she be nearby. Our eyes may be blurred by habit or anxiety or desire, or we may be troubled because we have to choose between this satisfaction or that, or between gratification and a sense of guilt. But by various means, of which travel is a good example, we try to escape these handicaps and sometimes, by design or chance, we succeed in escaping them. We find we can enjoy two experiences which we had thought were incompatible. Miraculously, inexplicably, a seascape, a city view, a humble natural object or some new perspective on our own life gives us a sense of fulfilment and inner peace. On such occasions the word beauty may come to our lips, and we have no more reason to doubt that we are in her presence than we feel when the word suggests itself at the theatre. Despite the many differences between them, the world of art is not discontinuous with the world of our everyday experience.

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BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

J. O. Bailey, Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind (Chapel Hill, N.C.: U. of N.C. Press, 1956. Pp. x plus 215 plus index. \$5.00.) In this rather slender volume, Dr. Bailey analyzes The Dynasts. His basic thesis is that the former ascription to Schopenhauer of the basis for Hardy's determinism and pessimism is erroneous. He insists that Hardy's philosophical source is rather to be found in Von Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious (1884). While Von Hartmann takes his point of departure from Schopenhauer's Will, he hypostasizes Will into a metaphysical "Unconscious" which must not, however, be confused with Freud's later construct. Von Hartmann's Unconscious is a sort of World-Spirit, which is apart from and separate from the individual psyche. Since Von Hartmann's philosophy is fundamentally theistic, Dr. Bailey finds in it a basis for ascribing to Hardy a melioristic, even a mystical, concept of a clash between a super-terrestrial Intelligence and the activities of human beings, especially strong human beings like Napoleon. The book presents two basic difficulties: 1) it is difficult to imagine an id concept in the form of a god-like force which is simply known as It with a capital I; 2) it is almost equally difficult to imagine the pessimistic Hardy of the later novels accepting what the author calls an "evolutionary meliorism" which leads him "to a hopeful and even religious view of the world." Hardy lived long enough to have known, potentially at least, the development of the concept of Unconscious and id as postulated by Freud. The author never mentions Freud, however, and the work suffers as a result from a lack of a parallelism that simply cries for expression.

Alan B. Rothenberg, The Mind Reader (New York: Greenberg, 1956. Pp. 223. \$3.00.) As frivolous and unimportant as the former work is serious and weighty, Mr. Rothenberg's novel has little to recommend it to the student of literature. It is a product of the marginal variety of science fiction, combined with cloak-and-dagger melodrama and international intrigue, the whole well mixed and spiced with a rather heavy dose of sex. It is more than slightly reminiscent of Pat Frank's Mr. Adam, with the substitution of extra-sensory perception for the hazards of the atomic age. It poses one slight but interesting problem which is treated with a certain degree of seriousness, a feature which we might expect from an author who is a poet and writer on mental hygiene as well as the son of an eminent psychoanalyst. When the author pictures his hero as Mind Reading the "stream of consciousness" of another character, he generally keeps the reading upon the level of superficial consciousness. He is aware, however, of the possibilities involved if his Mind Reader should attempt to plumb more deeply, and he uses the underwater metaphor for his descriptions of this elusive aspect of the psychic mechanism. His only serious problem is, expressed in his own words, "Of what value would telepathy be unless the Mind Reader could interpret conscious thoughts in terms of their unconscious symbolisms?"

E.B.M.
L.F.M.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (XXIV)

Since the last mention of American Image in these Bibliographies, the following articles of special interest to us have appeared:

- Helen B. Petrullo, "The Neurotic Hero of Types," 12, 4 (Winter, 1955), 317-23,
 Helen Huckel, "The Tragic Guilt of Prometheus," Ibid., 326-336,
 Edmund Bergler, "The Relation of Writers to Literary Criticism," Ibid., 337-41,
 Dorothy F. Seligs, "A Character Study of [the Biblical] Samuel," Ibid., 355-86,
 Joachim H. Seyppel, "The Animal Theme and Totemism in Franz Kafka," 13, 1,
 (Spring, 1956), 69-93 [This is a slightly revised version of our LA in IV, 4 (Nov.
 1954), 54-63],
 Arun Kumar Ray Chaudhuri, "A Psycho-Analytic Study of the Hindu Goddess (Kali)
 Concept," 13, 2 (Summer, 1956), 123-146,
 Merrill Moore, "Note on a Limerick," Ibid., 147-148,
 Erling Eng, "Cellini's Two Childhood Memories," Ibid., 189-203,
 Arthur Wormhoudt, "The Five Layer Structure of Sublimation and Literary Ana-
 lysis," Ibid., 205-219,
 Robert Plank, "Portraits of Fictitious Psychiatrists [in Science Fiction],"
 13, 3 (Fall, 1956), 259-267,

and

Robert A. Rosenthal, "To Tame a Fox," Ibid., 269-306.

The paper last mentioned basis its analysis of humor upon an excerpt from St. Exupéry's The Little Prince.

The September, 1956, issue (XXII, 3) of Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin has

Merrill Moore, "Hair into Snake," at pp. 61-63.

Subscribers' Notes and Contributions. Professor Eng and Dr. Moore have sent us offprints of their papers listed above.

Professor Walter H. Sokel calls our attention to his article

"Kafka's Metamorphosis: Rebellion and Punishment," in Monatshefte, April-May 56.

Professor Harry Bergholz will read a paper at the Scandinavian Section of MLA this Decem-
 ber on

"The Critical Reception of Ibsen's The Master Builder."

"In it," he writes, "I shall also deal with the psychological interpretation of the play; how-
 ever, more emphasis will be placed on Ludwig Binswanger's psycho-philosophic analysis as he
 has developed it on the basis of his Daseinsanalyse."

Professor William Rose (London) has called our attention to the following thesis, which
 he praises highly as a thorough study of the subject:

Joyce Pumfrey Morgan, "The Impact of the Theories of Psycho-Analysis on the
 Later Works of Thomas Mann," M. A. thesis in German at the University of London, 1956

The typescript of the thesis is deposited in the Library of the University of London and in
 that of the Institute of Germanic Languages and Literatures. It may be possible, however,
 for your editor to obtain microfilm thereof or even possibly to publish it in full in a later
 issue. "The thesis," writes Professor Rose, "does more than the title promises, for it tra-
 ces in detail Mann's attitude to psycho-analysis from his early days and comes to the conclu-
 sion that there were three stages in the development of his attitude."

Professor Wayne Burns has sent us his article,

"Critical Relevance of Freudianism," in Western Review, 20, 4 (Summer, 1956)
 301-314.

This is a thorough re-working of the author's LA, "Freudianism, Criticism and Jane Eyre,"
 which originally appeared in II, 5 (Nov., 1952), 4-13 (R 32-42).

The same issue of this journal also has

Bryllion Fagin, "Dostoevsky's Passion for Life," Ibid., 271-284.

Dr. William J. Ford has sent us an offprint of his review of the second volume of the
 Jones biography,

"The Mature Years of Sigmund Freud," Qtrly. Bull., Northwestern Univ. Med.
 School, 30, 2, 192-96.

We have also received an offprint of an important article, concerning which the author writes, "People have written for permission to translate it into French and Swedish. It is a kind of attempt at pioneering. I did not say exactly what I meant to say, but I said something, and much more could be said." The article is

Merrill Moore, "Some Psychiatric Considerations Concerning Creative Writing and Criticism," Amer. Journ. of Psychiatry, 112, 6 (Dec., 1955), 423-429.

Dr. Moore's investigation is based not so much upon psychodynamics as upon the interrelation of linguistic and physiobiological processes. He questions the possibility of scientific literary criticism; at the same time he tries to furnish a basis for something that looks very much like scientific criticism based upon the application of psychobiology to semantics:

Any theory of human knowledge must include an evaluation of the role of the neuro-physiological and neuro-semantic mechanisms involved in the acquisition of knowledge. Likewise, the part played by the nervous mechanisms of the critic becomes part of the criticism. It was on this point that the new physics of Einstein and Minkowski modified the old, and a similar evolution is now beginning to take place in modern literature when we admit that our interpretations of a given book or writer are dependent upon our processes of evaluation. (p. 429)

Complete copies of the offprint may be obtained by writing to Dr. Moore at 382 Commonwealth Ave., Boston 15, Mass. (Please follow the usual custom of enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope.)

Mr. Lesser reports as follows on two issues of Partisan Review:

Stanley Edgar Hyman, in "Freud and Tragedy," PR, 23, 2 (Spring, 1956),

ably and learnedly argues that Freud's view of human nature and general Weltanschauung -- unlike those fostered by Judaism, Christianity, the great Oriental faiths, and the neo-Freudian revisionists -- provides an intellectual and emotional climate in which tragedy can flourish.

Alfred Kazin's "Portrait of a Hero," Ibid.

is a tribute to Freud as man and intellectual conquistador. In particular, it examines the ways in which his Jewish background and scientific orientation shaped his gifts or curiosity and conviction.

Jerome S. Bruner, in "Freud and the Image of Man," PR, 23, 3 (Summer, 1956)

also concerns himself with the influence of Freud's Jewishness and nineteenth century determinism upon Freud's thought. In addition, Bruner mentions two other factors: Freud's romanticism (his sense of "the drama of life" and of "ways of knowing. . . more poetic than rational in spirit") and his respect for the classical tradition. Freud's essential intellectual contribution, Bruner feels, was that of breaking down such discontinuities as those between child and adult, mental illness and mental health. But Bruner makes what may be the mistake of ignoring Freud's passion for truth, which is singled out by Kazin as precisely the characteristic which distinguishes Freud from such a contemporary as Jung, and of assessing Freud's mode of thought as less "a theory in the conventional sense" than "a metaphor. . . a way of conceiving man, a drama."

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From a journal which has not heretofore been mentioned in these pages--

Jean-Paul Valabrega, "Aux Sources de la Psychanalyse," Critique (Revue générale des publications françaises et étrangères. Publiée avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), May, 1956 (N° 108), 446-456.

This article is in the form of a review of

Jacques Lacan, "Sur la parole et le langage," N° 1 of the series La Psychanalyse, published by the Société française de Psychanalyse.

The French psychoanalytic society was not founded until 1953, and the review discusses, among other things, the necessity for a systematic translation of Freud's collected works into French. The reviewer also comments on Dr. Lacan's interpretation of Freudian principles in linguistic terms:

La psychanalyse est originellement la découverte de l'inconscient. Or tous les principaux textes de Freud. . . montrent que cet inconscient est structuré comme un langage. Langage à déchiffrer, exactement comme les hiéroglyphes. Le déchiffrement, c'est la technique psychanalytique. Freud est le Champollion des hiéroglyphes de l'inconscient. (p. 447)

A review founded in France even more recently, Lettres Modernes (Histoire des Idées et des littératures), lists the following interesting titles:

Robert Minder, "L'image du père dans la littérature allemande," I (1954), 2

and

Roger Asselineau, "Le thème de la mort dans l'oeuvre de Whitman," I (1954), 10.

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In

Richard Harter Fogle's review of Hyatt H. Waggoner's Hawthorne: A Critical Study (Harvard: Belknap Press, 1955), Explicator, XV, 1 (October, 1956)

the reviewer comments favorably upon Professor Waggoner's "good use of Freudian and 'mythical' theory" in his explication of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Professor Fogle, however, takes exception to certain phases of Waggoner's use of psychoanalytic explication:

The dreamlike wanderings of Robin through Boston streets are the familiar Hawthorne journey in the maze or the wood of Error, as in 'Young Goodman Brown' or the minister in the wood in The Scarlet Letter. Also, Hawthorne stands farther away from his hero than Waggoner notices. The story specifies four times that Robin is 'a shrewd youth,' and the attribution has more than a single meaning. The point is more than trivial, for psychoanalytic and mythic analysis is weak in just this power of detecting conscious irony and sophisticated detachment, and is therefore incapable of remarking Hawthorne's eighteenth century elegance.

But see Bibliography (XVIII) -- V, 2, 38 -- (Newman) and, even more especially, Bibliography (XXI) -- VI, 2, 38 -- (Lesser).

The August, 1956, issue of Psych. Abstracts (30, 4) contains digests of

Edmund Bergler, "The Second Book and the Second Play," Psa.Rev., 42 (1955), 293-7

Edna C. Florance, "The Neurosis of Raskolnikov: A Study in Incest and Murder," Arch. Crim. Psychodynamics, I (1955), 344-396,

and

H.-J. von Schumann, "Phänomenologische und psychoanalytische Untersuchung der Homerischen Träume," Acta psychother., psychosom., orthopedagog., 3 (1955), 205-219.

The author last named is said to have found in the dreams of Homeric characters corroboration of the assumption of Homer's early loss of eyesight.

Science fiction once again comes in for comment (see Plank's article in Amer.Imago, supra) in

Steven G. Vandenberg, "Great Expectations; or, The Future of Psychology (as seen in Science Fiction)," Amer. Psychologist, 11, 7 (July, 1956), 339-342.

The September, 1956, issue of the same journal (11, 9) reprints the Bruner article from PR noted above and also has

Joseph Adelson, "Freud in America: Some Observations," at pp. 467-470.

From the October, 1956, issue (11, 10), we note

Frederick Wyatt, "Climate of Opinion and Methods of Readjustment," pp. 537-542,

Ija N. Korner, "Of Values, Value Lag, and Mental Health," pp. 543-546,

and, among the papers read at the celebration of the Centenary of Psychology (1856-1956) at Washington University, St. Louis,

Saul Rosenzweig, "The Cultural Matrix of the Unconscious," pp. 561-562.

Recent issues of Contemporary Psychology have the following:

Saxton T. Pope's review of Jungian works by Ira Progoff, Erich Neumann, and M. Esther Harding, I, 7 (July, 1956), 198-200,

Graham DuShane, "Of Books and Reading," I, 8 (Aug., 1956), 235 [reprinted from Science for April 27, 1956],

and

Reviews of Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart, 1955); Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); and Lionel Trilling, Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) by Joseph Adelson (on all three), Ludwig Immergluck (on Fromm), and Jerome L. Singer (on Marcuse); I, 9 (Sept., 1956). 271-275.

Dr. Singer's review calls for quotation:

What Trilling has called 'the grim poetry' of Freud's later metapsychology with its interesting interweaving of Eros, Thanatos, Reality repression, and primal horde guilt in the formation of civilization represents a formidable, if somber-hued philosophy of man and society. . . . As Marcuse puts it (pp. 17-18), 'Whatever liberty exists in the realm of the developed consciousness and in the world it has created is only derivative, compromised freedom, gained at the expense of the full satisfaction of needs. And in so far as the full satisfaction of needs is happiness, freedom in civilization is essentially antagonistic to happiness: it involves the repressive modification (sublimation) of happiness.'

If this formulation is correct, can mankind hope for progress to a life where work and joy are one and freedom and necessity united? Freud despaired of such a possibility, but Marcuse. . . seeks to demonstrate that the seeds of social progress are contained within Freud's own system. While disclaiming Utopian aims the author develops his thesis to the logical possibility that social change may eventually free the instinctual life and lead to the erotizing of personality and of human relationships and work. (274-275)

The fascinating series of autobiographical writings depicting neuroses and psychoses from the viewpoint of the patient himself, a series which includes works by William Seabrook, Clifford Beers, Jane Hillyer, William Ellery Leonard, Henry Collins Brown, and (probably the most influential of all) Daniel Paul Schreber, is carried on by

William L. Moore, The Mind in Chains (New York: Exposition Press, 1955), reviewed by Milton Wexler, I, 10 (Oct., 1956), 306.

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